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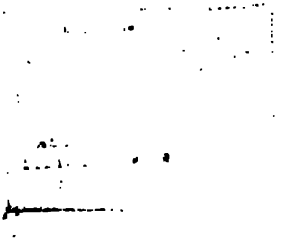
THE WINGED HELMET



"IT WAS GILBERTE, THE COUNTESS'S MAID"

(*See page 14*)

The WINGED HELMET

By

Harold Steele MacKaye

Author of "The Panchronicon," etc.

Illustrated by

H. C. Edwards

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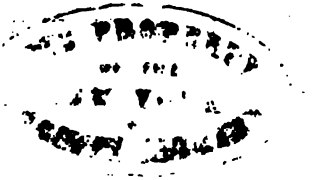

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Published February, 1905

COLONIAL PRESS
Electrotyped and Printed by C. H. Simonds & Co.
Boston, Mass., U. S. A.

INTRODUCTION

AMONG the picturesque hills near the headwaters of the Loire there lives a solitary, dried-up, white-haired little gentleman, quaintly known to his neighbours as the Sieur de Ravelle.

The last of a noble though not conspicuous family, he finds the sole pleasure of his lonely old age in collecting and ordering the chronicles of his forebears; struggling with a pathetic solicitude to perpetuate the past of a name to which he has not been permitted to give a future.

We met by the courtesy of the curé of his village, and, prompted by the good priest, I questioned the Sieur de Ravelle touching the story of his race.

What a spark lit the faded eyes! With what a happy glow did his sunken cheek reward me! My polite curiosity was warmed to a more generous interest, and before we parted he had invited me to his house.

His labour of love has collected a whole library of original records, letters, and scholarly notes,

which he showed to me with an enthusiasm almost religious. These he is now engaged in arranging in ordered narrative, and it is his story of the romantic circumstances attending the founding of his family which is set forth in the following pages.

The central material for this record is found in two manuscripts written many years after the events which they describe. These have been supplemented by the oral traditions of the families of Du Beaulieu and De Ravelle, reinforced by other and less pertinent records, from which the sagacity of the author has deduced a number of otherwise missing details.

If this account shall succeed in giving to others but a portion of the pleasure which I derived from it in the presence of the author, there will be no occasion for apology on behalf of

THE EDITOR.

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THE
WINGED HELMET

CHAPTER I.

WAR'S ALARM

EARLY in May, 1523, Francis the First was in Lyons. Filling the city and encamped far and wide about its walls lay the splendid army which he had gathered for the conquest of Milan. Every day of delay was a lost opportunity, and yet the king lingered with his brilliant court in this city beside the Rhone, seemingly forgetful of glory and conquest.

The glitter and pomp of war paid their tribute to gay Revelry, but it was more than mere love of pleasure that held inactive the brave and ambitious king.

The Duke of Bourbon, the man to whom above all others Francis had owed his renown in war,

seemed on the point of rebellion. Driven to desperation by the amorous cruelties of the king's own mother, deprived of his high command, and about to be sued by the queen dowager for the possession of his dukedom, Charles of Bourbon lay in one of his many castles, pleading illness in excuse of his failure to join his master.

In such a plight the king could not turn his back on France to meet a foreign foe, and, in spite of the reckless gaieties with which he surrounded himself, Francis was filled with inward gloom.

To the north and west of Lyons lay the Bourbonnais, a beautiful and fertile region comprising nearly one-fifth of France and lying in the very heart of the kingdom. Here the feudal spirit was strong, and, if the duke renounced his allegiance to the king, he might well expect that the majority of the Bourbon nobility would follow their immediate overlord in his rebellion.

Throughout the dukedom men breathed the spirit of that gloomy uncertainty which Francis sought vainly to throw off. From village to village, from house to house, rumour followed rumour, telling of the duke's illness, the king's advances, and the Bourbon's sullen silence.

Yet then, even as now, Childhood and Care were strangers, and, in the midst of this gathering tem-

pest, the prattle and play of unconscious little ones went on as ever.

Little Antoine, son of Denys, found his fifth spring a season of delight and mystery. Little recked he of plots and wars as he scampered down the highway near the village of Beaulieu, chasing the first white butterfly of the year, and shouting his baby slogan all alone.

Suddenly the hunted insect flew straight upward, and, raising his head to watch its flight, the child beheld a sight that filled him with a new and a more absorbing interest.

Two riders had turned into the road and were trotting toward him. The first, a man of sturdy frame and commanding pose, turned a face full of courteous animation toward his companion, whose rich habit and sweeping plume filled the child with admiring awe.

The noble pair were too absorbed in each other to notice the child, and he, in his delighted surprise, stood open-mouthed watching these dazzling forms loom larger and larger, without thought of danger.

The beat of hoofs grew to a sudden thunder as the great beasts towered far above him. Not till then did pleasure give place to alarm, and, turning quickly, the child stumbled and fell with a scream of terror.

The two steeds reared and swerved aside together. Little Antoine, with his face in the grass, did not see them as they halted in a whirl of dust. The nobleman, giving his bridle into the lady's hand, ran quickly forward, and, almost before the child had really begun to cry, he felt himself raised to his feet by two strong hands, and saw before him a handsome, manly face softened now by a tender and reassuring smile.

"There, there, mannikin!" the wonderful stranger was saying. "You're not hurt a bit. You're not afraid — you are a brave boy, eh?"

The fright and the rising sob were gone, for all the little soul was centred in wonder on that fierce black moustache, those tender, dark eyes, that splendid collar of lace and gold, that riding-hat of infinite beauty.

Amazed, awestruck, under his breath the urchin faltered:

"Are you Our Lord?"

At this the cavalier stood erect again, and, oh, how tall and mighty he looked between the baby and the sky!

"Poor baby!" was the laughing reply, "I am *your* lord, — yes, and your father's lord, — or I mistake. Will you come and ride with me?"

The glorious stranger stooped again, holding out

both hands. The reply was only two answering arms held out in silence.

From her lofty seat the lady beheld her husband approaching, and a wave of longing and hope softened her blue eyes as she leaned forward to speak to the little tot nestling against the strong man's neck.

"Are you hurt, dear?" she asked.

The troubled locks were shaken in silence.

"What is your name, laddie?"

"It is the son of Denys," the man replied, as he approached his horse's side. "We must take his mother to task for her negligence."

"Alas!" the countess replied, sighing half-enviously. "With six little ones to rear, she can scarce avoid losing sight of one for awhile!"

Soon the little lad found himself high in the air, and felt beneath him the rise and fall of one of those mighty chargers. Frightened at first, the tender familiarity of his captor soon put him at ease, and ere long the little chap had grasped the bridle and was indulging the illusion that his chubby fists were controlling his steed.

Past tree and hedge and hut, over sand and turf and bridge they rode, the little urchin laughing aloud from time to time, and looking up into his protector's eyes.

Soon the three had reached the village of Beaulieu, and, almost opposite the little church, they turned to the right and passed between the rough stone gate-posts marking the entrance to the castle park.

Looking up the road, between two rows of chestnuts, they saw a horse held by a groom just beyond the drawbridge. From the trappings upon the animal, it was clear that some noble visitor was within.

The nobleman leaned forward eagerly with a new light in his eyes.

"News, news!" he cried, and, spurring his beast, he dashed up the road, followed at once by his companion.

"Here, Martin, take the child. Who has called?"

As the little one was delivered to the uplifted hands of one of the men-at-arms, there was a glitter of blue and scarlet from within the open doorway, and some one cried:

"Ah, Du Beaulieu! God be praised you have come! It is war — war!"

The countess uttered a little cry of dismay as Du Beaulieu leaped to the ground, crying:

"De Pompelac — you! And you say — "

"The Duke de Bourbon has fled from Moulin!"

"Armand!"

The countess was at her husband's side. She clung to his arm, looking beseechingly into his face.

In the midst of his intense excitement the count stopped and took his wife's hand.

"*Ma mie,* be brave!" he exclaimed.

"Armand — I fear not. But you — Oh, promise them nothing! Do not follow a rebel! Oh, I beseech!"

Du Beaulieu drew himself up, and stopped her with a gesture.

"My wife, I must do my duty. My lord is the duke."

"But, Armand —"

He put one finger to his lips with a sad smile. "Not before the servants," he whispered.

Then running up the short flight of steps, the count disappeared within the castle.

For one moment the countess gazed miserably after her husband. Then, lifting her skirt with one hand, she hurried away into a side path to escape the eyes of her servants.

In the meantime the guards — full of the great news of coming war — promptly forgot the baby, and he was suffered to scamper back toward the park gate. On the highway there were butterflies.

Presently he heard a whistle from among the

park brushes, and, turning, he saw a peasant half-hidden in the shrubbery. In this man's hand was something bright, and on his handsome young face a winning smile.

After a moment of hesitation, the child walked out of the road, and holding up one little hand:

"Pretty, pretty, give to François, man!" he said.

The peasant stooped and let him take the bright silver medal in his hand, slipping over the child's neck the thin chain which held it.

"Baby want another pretty medal?" he asked, with a caressing smile.

The little one nodded, his eyes big with delighted wonder.

The peasant pointed after the countess, whose retreating form was still visible on an opposite pathway.

"Take this one to the sweet lady, and she will show you more pretty medals," he said. "But François must run quickly!"

With each step in her solitary walk, the heart of the countess sank lower.

It was to be war then!

Hers was not alone the sickening fear of a wife who sees her husband depart for a war whence he may never return. To this, as a nobleman's wife,

she had looked forward from the first. But this was worse — far worse.

A native of northern France, born a De Bersier, the Countess du Beaulieu was a hearty and consistent royalist. In her eyes rebellion against the king was a crime second only to sacrilege. Loyalty to the Crown was fidelity to France.

Her husband had been brought up in a land where each man looked first to his feudal superior. He saw only his duty to the duke. He was the duke's man. Him he would follow. Moreover, the count knew the many wrongs to which Bourbon had submitted, and his noble heart had often burned with indignation at the insults to which his chief had been subjected by the court.

Yvonne felt with him the shame and the wrong which the duke had suffered, but rebellion against France, — this reported league with Charles V. of Spain and Henry VIII. of England, — these could not be justified by any sufferings, however great.

These were the thoughts, these the fears that beset her as she walked past shrubs and flower-beds with heedless eyes bent upon the ground.

Soon she reached a stone bench that stood beside a sun-dial. Here she seated herself, and, clasping her hands before her, bent forward in anxious thought.

Almost immediately she was startled out of her reverie by a small treble voice at her side.

"François want 'nother medal, sweet lady!"

She turned and saw the child of her morning ride. His hands were outstretched, and in one a glittering object was half-hidden by the grimy little fingers.

Again the light of motherly tenderness shone in her eyes as she leaned forward, extending her arms.

"Let the lady see, babykins," she said, softly.

Trustfully the child put his treasure into his friend's hand.

Yvonne examined the silver medal curiously for a moment. Then with a look of amazement she sprang to her feet.

"Henri's talisman!" she exclaimed. She gazed swiftly about her, as though seeking the owner of this familiar bauble. Then she stooped toward the child and said:

"Where did baby get the pretty medal?"

The child pointed back over the path.

"Will baby take the lady to the place?"

"Man give it to François," was the reply.

"Yes, yes. Now, baby, take lady to the man."

She took the child's hand, and he started back toward the main drive of the park. Yvonne's heart was beating with the double excitement of curiosity

and dread. What could this strange coincidence mean!

As the baby brought her to the point where the path entered the main avenue, he pointed to a clump of lilac-bushes, at the foot of which there kneeled a peasant, apparently engaged in softening the earth about the roots. He seemed some gardener's assistant.

This man raised his head and gazed for one moment into the lady's face. Then he turned swiftly to his work again.

The child cried out as he felt his hand pressed in a spasmodic grip. He looked up and saw consternation and amazement in the lady's face.

"Henri!" she exclaimed, under her breath. "My brother here!"

She glanced to right and left, and then slowly walked over to the lilac-bush.

"Henri! Mon Dieu, what brings you here?" she exclaimed, in a low voice.

"Hush, little sister!" he replied, without looking up. "You must not stand there, with the child, too. Where can I see you alone?"

"But these clothes — this disguise — I thought you with the king!"

"Parley may mean my death," was the rapid

reply. "Tell me quickly. Where can I see you alone? It is for the king, girl, — for the king!"

A burning tide rushed from her heart to her face. She understood his danger now. With the tense whisper of nervous fear, she replied:

"I will send my maid for you, — Gilberte, you know her?"

"No," he said. "You forget that I have never seen your husband or any of his household."

"Yes, yes! But I will send her here. Gilberte will come. She will stand by this bush and say: 'The king is lord of France.' Then you will know her. Follow her, and she will bring you to me."

"Good, good, faithful little sister! God bless you!"

"Good-bye," she whispered, and, lifting the child from the ground, she hurried back to the castle.

When she reached the door, the porter informed her that the count had hurried away with the Baron de Pompelac, leaving word that he would not be back before night.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPY

THE southeast corner of the Château du Beaulieu was occupied by a massive octagonal tower covered with green vines save where the crenelated parapet loomed gray against the sky. A single richly furnished room occupied the entire second story of this tower. Brilliant Italian tapestries concealed the stone walls, and on the floor were spread rare carpets brought from Palestine by an ancestor on his return from a crusade. Before the east window stood a couch hung with Moorish leather from Spain.

Opposite the window a door opened from the bedroom of the countess, and a second door gave access to the corridor which led to the main stairway. Between the doors were set a sewing-frame, a carved cabinet, and a harp. By the chimney, which occupied one eastern wall, there stood two carved armchairs from Rome, with tall, straight backs.

Ever since he had brought his lady hither as a

bride, Du Beaulieu had abandoned this room to her sole use. Here she could always feel sure of solitude, for this room the count never entered.

From a secret trap in the chimney a narrow stair concealed in the castle wall led to a passage which, running under the moat, emerged a short distance beyond, near the edge of a wood. The maid, Gilberte, had discovered this passage one night by accident, and Yvonne felt convinced that her lord was ignorant of its existence.

Here it was, then, that the countess sat alone that afternoon, nervously awaiting the arrival of her brother. From her window she was watching a side door at the foot of a second tower, whence ere long there emerged a well-built, resolute-looking young woman dressed in the picturesque costume of a native peasant. She stood for a moment looking about her with precaution.

It was Gilberte, the countess's maid.

From a well-poised head there hung two black braids of hair, at that moment drawn forward so as to fall upon her firm bust. Her well-shaped figure and erect pose suggested a self-reliance not common in her class. Her face was round, the skin sun-browned, with red cheeks. Beneath black brows, not too thick, bright dark eyes gazed frankly forth; and as she peered from side to side to make sure

that she was unobserved, a half-smile of excitement disclosed a row of strong white teeth. Buoyant health, unbounded vitality, seemed to surround her like an individual atmosphere.

With her equals Gilberte was masterful and subject to frequent fits of temper. To her superiors she paid due deference, but with a certain reserve of independence, despite her condition. For the countess she was the soul of dog-like devotion. For her mistress she would have suffered any fate, committed any crime. Here her love was the ruling passion of her life.

The maid glanced upward and waved her hand to the watching lady in the eastern tower, her smile brightening with pleasure. Then, with another quick glance to right and left, she ran swiftly toward the front of the castle, and was lost to her mistress's sight.

Then followed a period of waiting in which every minute seemed an hour. Now nervously pacing the floor, now listening at the trap-door, Yvonne began to think that for some reason the interview had been postponed. But at length a distant footfall sounded hollow behind the sliding panel. Standing before the chimney, the countess stood tensely awaiting her brother's appearance. What was this terrible, this mysterious message? Now she would know.

Noiselessly the panel slipped away, and from the black void beyond it there stepped the seeming peasant.

"Henri! At last!" cried the countess, and, gliding forward, she threw herself into his arms.

One moment he pressed her to him and kissed her brow. Then, gently but quickly freeing himself, he glanced nervously about him.

"This room?" he asked.

"It is my private boudoir. Armand never comes here."

"We can be alone here — uninterrupted?"

"Gilberte," said the countess, "wait in the hall. If any one approaches, knock upon the door."

Bowing, the maid stepped silently from the room. De Bersier removed his hat and sank upon the couch with a sigh. Yvonne seated herself beside him and gazed earnestly into his face. The youthful features seemed prematurely wrinkled with the intensity of his nervous tension. Yet, even as she looked, more of peace shone in his eyes as they answered hers. She smiled at sight of his loved features, and, taking one of his hands, she stroked it gently as she spoke.

"Here you are safe, Henri," she said. "Speak freely and fully. What is your message? Why this secrecy in your sister's house?"

His hand closed upon hers as he replied:

"Have you heard the news?"

"Of Bourbon?"

"Yes; did you know — do you know of his rebellion?"

She bent her head in reply.

"Then you will understand, dear sister. In one word, I am the king's spy. I am surrounded here by powerful enemies. I know only one person whom I can surely trust, and that is — yourself."

She raised her head.

"And the king has trusted you for this dangerous service?" she said, proudly.

"Even so, little sister," was the almost gay reply. "The Bishop of Parsy has engaged to send to his Majesty a list of those noblemen who are likely to join the duke. Du Prat has sent me to procure it."

"The Bishop of Parsy!" the countess cried. "Do you know what you are saying? He has himself declared for Bourbon. Why, the clergy, with the bishop at their head, are the loudest of all in their rebellious utterances."

"For a good reason," Henri replied. "They are weak, the clergy, my dear sister; and they have treasures with which they are loth to part. What think you would be the fate of their wealth were

they to let their tongues betray to rebellious lords the loyalty of their hearts? No, no, believe me. The king has good reasons for trusting the Bishop of Parsy. My presence here proves it."

Yvonne was amazed, bewildered, by this revelation. This course of false statement and falser act puzzled her frank mind.

"But, Henri," she said, at length, "if this be so, why come you here to the house of one who may at any time declare for your enemies? You must be well aware that, were you discovered here, — you, a royal spy, — neither my lord nor I could save your life."

Even to her brother she could not bring herself to speak of her lord as of one devoted already to the rebel cause.

"Because, dear sister, of two excellent reasons. Firstly, the bishop is afraid to have me go to the episcopal palace, even in disguise. Secondly — because I wish to make you useful to his Majesty, in order that your husband's name may find credit in a court so prone to slander as that of France."

She looked earnestly into her brother's eyes, and saw that he knew the truth. This hint of slander was but a tactful method of showing her his knowledge of her husband's position. She guessed his errand. Rising, she stood a few moments in silence.

"So I am to act as messenger between you and the lord bishop?" she said at last.

Henri looked a little surprised.

"Oho! We are not as stupid as we pretend to be, we country folk!" he exclaimed, with a smile.

"And pray how is the bishop to be persuaded to trust his precious list to the wife of a — to me?"

Henri showed her a plain gold ring, which he placed in her hands. It had no setting, and was innocent of all inscription.

"Wear that on the little finger of your right hand when you take the holy sacrament next Sunday. The bishop is to administer the Host. When he sees the ring worn thus — well, trust him to give you the list unperceived."

Henri's face was grave, and he gazed earnestly at his sister. She fell into a reverie.

It was but a simple service that was asked of her. How could she refuse it? Henri was exposing his life for the king, and he spoke in his name. Surely she — his sister — should not shrink from so simple a thing as this — to receive a note from the bishop.

"Henri," she said, at last, "you want me to bring this list to you so that you may take it to Du Prat. Well — I accept the charge — but — "

"But Armand's name must not be on the list. Is it not so?"

She nodded.

Henri rose and took her hand.

"Have I not told you my reasons for coming to you instead of to another?" he said. "Do you think I would consent to carry my little sister's name on such a roll as that? Why, Yvonne, it was the thought of Armand's possible indiscretion which led me to seek this mission!"

"But the bishop will not think of me — the bishop — "

Henri shook his head slightly, and smiled again.

"One year older than I, and yet so innocent, dear! The roll will bear Armand's name with the others, if, as I fear, he has been — well — imprudent. But your little brother's memory will be the sole repository of what that list contains. You shall burn it yourself, after I have read it."

"But, Henri, am I the only person who can reach the bishop? Have you no other intermediary?"

"Listen, dear," said De Bersier; "I sought this mission to save your husband. Another might have reached the bishop directly, perhaps, but such a person would not have dropped Armand's name from the roll. The bishop is too timid to receive any stranger, and you are the only loyal person whom

I know in this neighbourhood. Besides, if it can be said that you aided me in this, do you not see how it will serve to avert suspicion from your husband? Is it so hard a thing to do to save Armand?"

Yvonne rose and turned away to the window. Surely this plan was effective. She could not doubt Henri's loyalty to her house. More! This list, which would otherwise reach the king in its completeness, — was not this the only means to remove its possible danger to Du Beaulieu?

As she looked out, the bright green of the May foliage, bravely striped and flecked with yellow sunlight, filled her eyes. They overflowed with Nature's own frank courage. The future seemed bright, and harm far away.

She turned again, and found her brother standing by her side. She gazed upon him with a proud affection. For the first time she examined him, and noted how the youthful page whom she remembered had reached the first stage of manhood. Although just seventeen, he looked already like a knight and a courtier, even under the rough clothing of a peasant. She saw reflected in his young face the light and hope of the scene without, and her heart grew warm to him.

"Henri, I will do it!" she exclaimed, extending her hand

He bowed and kissed her fingers, and then, drawing her to him, touched her forehead with his lips in a more fraternal greeting. She drew away from the window in some trepidation. There could be little doubt what would be thought if they were seen thus from without.

"It is understood, then," said he. "I cannot return before Tuesday, for my prolonged presence, even in this disguise, would not fail to excite suspicion. Tuesday night of next week at moonrise Gilberte will find me at the outer entrance to the secret passage. She shall lead me here, and here you can give me the bishop's roll."

"On Tuesday night, then. I shall do my part."

She called Gilberte, and, with a parting embrace, he was gone. The secret trap was open, and Yvonne stood gazing into the darkness until the steps of the departing messenger and of his guide had ceased to sound hollow in the cold depths below.

CHAPTER III.

THE FATAL LIST

THE appointed Sunday came, and, as the countess rode to church in her chair, her husband riding by her side on his black charger, her heart beat high with excitement.

Uncertain of just what was before her, she feared for the result of her mission. As she thought of her errand, she almost repented having undertaken it.

As they entered the church, she hoped for a moment that the bishop would not be there; but, bowing her knee to the high altar, she saw the episcopal robes, and knew the proud, cold face of the Bishop of Parsy.

Throughout the service, the distracted woman could only wonder how the bishop would contrive to give her the fatal scroll. Secrecy seemed impossible, and yet, surrounded as they were by the king's declared opponents, discovery in this betrayal of

their secret would imply consequences to all her house that she dared not contemplate.

The time came, and, with trembling knees and parched lips, Yvonne went to the altar-rail. She fell upon her knees dazed with nervous dread.

She retained enough sense of her situation to so dispose her hands that the bishop might see the ring Henri had given her. Then she bowed her head and prayed for her husband's safety. She could not forget that, if she failed and were discovered, he would be involved in the result.

The sacred words of the bishop, as he passed up the line of waiting communicants, seemed only a monotonous, meaningless drone drawing fatally nearer — nearer.

Her prayers now were all for support in the coming trial. Self-control, continued thought itself, seemed slipping away as each instant brought closer that dreaded moment when she must take the secret scroll — she knew not how.

Indeed, how was it to be done unperceived? She could not foresee.

The torture of suspense, the fear that in her ignorance, her lack of preparation, she might thwart the bishop's design — a thousand fears half-formed — all weighed upon her heart, and made its every beat a dull agony.

He was here!

She stared, pale, beside herself with apprehension, into the bishop's face.

She saw his eyes as they fell on the signal-ring. They seemed to kindle a liquid fire within her. She realized that the dread instant had been reached.

That cold, proud face changed not a muscle, nor did the flow of sacred Latin pause or tremble. Yvonne opened her lips, mechanically, unwittingly. At the proper moment the bishop's slender fingers slipped the sacred wafer from the golden salver into her mouth, and at the next instant the sacrament was being administered to her husband kneeling at her left.

Was she herself in that first moment of disappointment and keen relief? Certainly the shock and strain had partially suspended her bodily functions. In vain she pressed the sacred wafer between tongue and palate, as Holy Church prescribes. Her mouth was perfectly dry, and the wafer would not soften.

But the scroll! The awful list that was to give the king the names of his enemies, — where was it? What had been done with it? Could it be — but, no; she had seen the bishop's eyes as he had gazed at the ring. He must have recognized it.

Then a new fear came over her. She thought that the bishop had determined to return after the

ceremony, and, seeking further speech with her, to slip the scroll unperceived into her hand.

This new dread so weakened her that she remained kneeling at the rail after the others had arisen. The count retired with the others, and awaited his wife's rising at the back of the church. In her dread, Yvonne determined not to leave the rail until the bishop finally departed. She felt that she could not meet him — could not endure again what she had passed through.

But ere long another cause held her a prisoner at the rail. Her utmost efforts would not so restore the natural moisture to her parched tongue as to enable her to dissolve the holy wafer. She dared not touch it with her teeth. Her confessor, Father Paul, had taught her the sacrilege of so treating the Body of God. But, despite all she could do, the sacred morsel remained as hard and as firm as ever.

There leaped into her sinking mind the thought that this was a miracle, — a punishment for thus impiously bringing worldly scheming to the altar of God. Could it be that the mysterious change of the Host had not occurred? Was she condemned never again to taste the bliss of holy communion? Was this the unpardonable sin that she had committed?

To this extreme was she carried by her terror. She would have shrieked in her torment, but, fortunately, with this new emotion, there came a rush of moisture to her mouth, and she distinctly tasted the astringent flavour of pine wood.

That moment of amazement saved her. She bowed her head into her hands and dropped the wafer into her palm. There was no one near, and she could do this unperceived.

She beheld in her hand a marvellously fashioned pine box, exactly in the form and size of the sacred wafer. She guessed in an instant that within this envelope the fatal list would be found.

There came a step behind her, and she quickly slipped the box into the bosom of her dress. Then she arose, and found that Du Beaulieu had just reached her side.

"What is it, *ma mie?*" he asked, kindly.

Blushing and silent, she buried her face on his breast.

He kissed her forehead, and together they passed down the main aisle. In the midst of the terrors of her strange position, she remembered their first walk from the altar, and, glancing up, saw in Armand's eyes that his thoughts were with hers.

CHAPTER IV.

DE POMPELAC'S THREAT

THE count was obliged to attend a meeting of the Duke of Bourbon's adherents at the castle of Calmère. Yvonne returned to Beaulieu, therefore, unaccompanied, save for her maid, who sat opposite her, and the servant who drove the mules attached to her chair.

They had traversed perhaps one-half of the route to the castle when the chaise stopped, and, raising the curtain, which had been dropped on account of a gentle rain, Yvonne saw the Baron de Pompelac standing alone at her side.

De Pompelac was lord of the castle of that name, and his estates adjoined those of Beaulieu. He was professedly a close friend of Du Beaulieu, and, unfortunately, knew his character but too well. But he was in personal feud with young Henri de Bersier, and, close as he was to her husband, Yvonne hated him.

With hat in hand, the baron had lowered his head in an elaborate bow, and, even before his raised eyes had reached her face, he spoke.

"Fair lady," he said, "may I crave the honour of a private interview? I will detain your ladyship but for a moment."

He glanced significantly at Gilberte, and she looked at the countess with a question in her eyes.

"I hear nothing, my lord," Yvonne replied, "which may not be said in the presence of my maid or my husband."

De Pompelac smiled and bowed again.

"Admirable discretion!" he replied, sarcastically, "and yet, madame, what I have to say would perhaps grieve this damsel here."

The tone was unaccountably insolent. Drawing back coldly, the countess dropped the curtain and bade the driver proceed. To her astonishment, De Pompelac forbade her man to obey, and at the next moment the curtain was again raised, this time by the hand of the baron himself.

His right hand supported the curtain, and his left held a small scrap of parchment. His prominent gray eyes glared like steel beads, and his full red lips were curled in actual scorn.

"Before you proceed, gentle lady," he drawled, "let me read a curious legend here inscribed."

He raised the parchment and repeated the following words, — repeated them, for he could not read:

"'To the Count du Beaulieu: — Guard well the nest in your eastern tower. The cuckoo has found the window.'"

Looking into Yvonne's face, he continued:

"Would it not please your good husband to find such a scrap as this on his breakfast-table?"

The enormity of this insult blinded the countess to the fearful danger which underlay it. There could be no mistake. De Pompelac well knew that the eastern tower was her own retreat, and that even her husband never entered it.

This scurrilous attack upon her honour and her lord's so enraged her that without a word she snatched the baron's poignard from his belt, and would have stabbed him in the energy of her indignation had he not leaped back and avoided the blow.

Laughing, he faced her look of hate and outraged pride as though she had been a peasant girl with whom he had amused himself.

"Quick hand, good thrust!" he exclaimed. "I make you a present of the dague, madame. You deserve it."

Then, with a change of manner, he again showed

her the parchment in his hand, and continued, coldly:

"But, as for this, I assure you that I am serious. I happen to have seen a familiar face at the window of the eastern tower yesterday."

With a quick sinking at the heart, Yvonne sank back and glanced at Gilberte. The maid was as pale as her mistress.

"Ah! you see what we are coming to," he continued, with a sneer. "You realize what this little scrap means if my lord Du Beaulieu gets it into his hands."

Alas! she did, only too well!

"Now, my dear lady," said the baron, less insolently, "the fact is that I want to see your brother on a little matter of my own. I have business with the good King Francis myself, unworthy as I may seem. All I wish to know is, when are you to see young De Bersier again?"

Yvonne glanced coldly at him, and replied:

"You know too much already, my lord."

Glancing up the road, De Pompelac saw some one approaching. He replied, speaking very rapidly:

"And I intend to know more. Either I see your brother alone, or my lord Du Beaulieu will find this on his breakfast-table. I give you until to-

morrow at noon to make up your mind. If you come to a sensible decision, wave that green neckerchief of yours from the window of the eastern tower as nearly at noon as may be. On this signal, I will at once join you in the tower, and you can tell me when and how to see Henri de Bersier. But, mark you," — and here his dark face grew yet darker with menace, — " remember that, if I do not see the green scarf at the window to-morrow, Du Beaulieu shall find this parchment and will read it. Young De Bersier's person is unknown to my lord, and I think you know what mercy the stripling may expect when next he visits my lady's bower."

With a parting smile and sneer, the knight hurried away, and Yvonne could scarcely find voice to bid the driver proceed. He had been standing at some distance, and she called thrice ere he heard her.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORM BREAKS

THE terrible feature of Yvonne's position lay in the fact that De Pompelac was a secret and deadly enemy of her brother. If she afforded him a meeting, the end could only be Henri's death. She was not the dupe of his pretended business with the king. If once De Pompelac became acquainted with De Bersier's movements, every noble in the vicinage would join the baron for the capture of the king's spy. De Pompelac thought her ignorant of his hatred for her brother, but Henri had given her the details of their feud in a letter written nearly a year before.

On the other hand, if that dastardly anonymous message fell into her husband's hands, his jealous rage would drive him to utter madness. The wound to his pride arising from so coarse an insult would alone suffice to make the count beside himself. He would be without reason — blind. She would prob-

ably be his first victim, Henri, on his arrival according to arrangement, would be the second.

During Du Beaulieu's short courtship, and at the time of his marriage, Henri de Bersier had been in Italy, a page in the family of his father's friend, the Marquis di Palomi. It thus happened that the count had never met his wife's brother, and was thus at the mercy of De Pompelac's plot.

That night, as Yvonne lay by her husband's side, sleep driven far by her fears, she made up her mind to take the one desperate chance left. She determined to tell her husband all that had happened.

She knew that Henri would be taken prisoner, and the royal cause prejudiced; but it was a part of her design to entreat her husband to remember his supreme duty to his king. She would exert all the power of their love to drag him from his mistaken adherence to the Duke of Bourbon.

By thus privately confiding young De Bersier's mission to the count, her brother's life would be spared, and, at the worst, Du Beaulieu would hold him a secret prisoner.

The delusions of her fancy so led her away that she looked upon herself as already out of danger, and, with a mind relieved, sank into a deep slumber just as the first cock crowed the approach of morn.

She was awakened by the subtle mastery of an-

other's gaze. While yet half-asleep, she had raised herself in bed, and she opened her eyes to find the sun high in the heavens.

Still following that overbearing influence, she turned and found herself gazing into her husband's face distorted with passion. Behind the mask of rage she scarcely knew him.

The eyes were two blazing centres, the lips a firm red line on a skin almost as red with passion, the veins in his neck swollen and purple, the muscles of his strong jaws projecting in a ridge like iron on either side.

To be suddenly awakened by the glare of such a countenance! What wonder she shrank back among the pillows! What wonder her face turned white with deadly fear!

Du Beaulieu's arms were folded, and, as he spoke, he seemed to hold himself, seeming afraid of his own action.

"Awake, madame?" he asked. "Look at that!"

With a fling of his arm, a piece of white parchment fluttered on to the bed.

She needed not to look. As though by a flash of lightning, all the sickening fears of the day before were revealed to her memory, and she saw again that very scrap of parchment between the

fingers of De Pompelac. She needed not to read — those words were burned into her brain.

Du Beaulieu laughed as the look of horror deepened in her face.

"What! Do you guess its import? You will not read it? Then hear it," and he drew slowly nearer.

"'To the Count du Beaulieu: — Guard well the nest in your eastern tower. The cuckoo has found the window.'"

His face was by this time thrust almost against her own. His fierce breath scorched her. She shrank yet farther back, extending her hand to keep him from coming nearer.

"Armand!"

It was all she could say.

She sickened with the conscious thought that the stamp of guilt was laid upon her innocence. Every sentiment that forms the expression of a guilty face she felt before her husband's eyes. Fear, foreknowledge of the yet unformed accusal, dread of the truth itself, and yet she was innocent, — innocent, with all the load of guilt's appearance.

He could only see the false story her features told; he *could* not know how Fate had formed them to lying self-accusal. Slowly a great contempt took

its place beside the consuming anger in his eyes. That was worst of all!

"Such baseness in so fair a skin!" he whispered, "and too weak to hide her shame before a mere accusal! So full of guilt, her face cries out as though with words, 'Tis true, 'tis true.'"

He had straightened himself, and was now standing beside the bed. Suddenly his hand shot forward and caught hers, which she still held extended to keep him away.

"What is this?"

Roughly he tore from her finger the ring Henri had given her, and held it before his face. She knew how terribly this must confirm suspicion, and clasped her hands in speechless agony.

The ring fell to the ground. She saw her husband's fingers working as with the rage to act, felt a giant's grasp on her shoulders, and was borne aloft like a straw in the wind. Then, with a shock, all consciousness was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREEN SCARF

TEARS were raining on Yvonne's face, and she came to her senses wondering stupidly why she was weeping. Gilberte was on her knees beside her. The tears she had felt were hers.

"Gilberte!"

Letting her gaze wander, the countess saw that she was lying upon the floor of her bedroom at the foot of her prie-dieu. She looked again at Gilberte, and, starting up, leaned upon one hand. Blood was trickling upon the maid's shoulder.

"Gilberte!" she repeated, faintly. "You are wounded!"

"It is nothing, dear lady. My lord did it before my lady wakened."

The countess covered her face with her hands.

"Armand — my husband!" she groaned.

"Let us think of yourself, my lady," said Gilberte. "I thought you killed or seriously hurt. Can you try to rise?"

With her maid's help, Yvonne struggled to a chair. Bruised she was from head to foot, but otherwise unhurt.

"How came I there?" she asked.

"My lord dashed you to the ground, then drew his dagger, but stayed his hand, and rushed from the room like a madman. It is a miracle he had not killed you."

"Would he had!" she murmured, in bitterness of spirit. "Would God he had!"

"And your brother?"

The three words filled her with new life — new pain, too — but still with life.

"Henri! Yes, yes! He must be saved. How warn him? How reach him?"

"The Baron de Pompelac played his card too soon," said Gilberte, dryly. "At least *his* game is thwarted."

"True! He has missed his mark!" cried the countess, and the triumph of that thought was like a tonic to her.

Then, arising, she forced Gilberte to be seated, found her wound, and proceeded to wash and anoint it. Such things she understood. The girl's scalp had been torn, but she appeared to feel nothing, so ardently was her quick mind at work.

"I must find M. de Bersier, my lady, and take

him the scroll as well. It shall never be said that a Du Beaulieu was made to fail by a De Pompelac. I have a brother who is, saving your presence, something of a poacher. He can doubtless take me to those most likely to shelter a stranger peasant without inconvenient questionings. Trust me — I will find him."

It was with difficulty that Yvonne could make the eager girl remain seated while she treated her, so anxious was she to be gone upon her quest.

"At least," said the countess, "we have until to-morrow to warn him. This is but Monday morning."

"Nearly noon," said Gilberte. "Ah, the Baron de Pompelac will look for his green scarf in vain, I warrant," and she laughed, scornfully.

At length the task was finished, and, eager to set out, Gilberte asked for the scroll.

Yvonne found the tiny box, and opened it. It contained only a number of circles of very thin parchment, but each circle bore the coat of arms of a noble family. This was the fatal list that was to go to the king. She picked out the hound's head of the crest of Du Beaulieu. This she burned, and, replacing the parchments in the box, gave the whole to Gilberte.

"Tell him nothing," said the countess, "but bid

him hasten away with his treasure. It is the price of my life's happiness!"

Gilberte kissed her mistress's hand, and was gone. The countess dressed as quickly as she could for her many bruises, which had now grown stiff and painful. Then she walked to the window.

Here the view commanded the postern-gate and drawbridge, and, to Yvonne's surprise, the first person she saw was Gilberte. She had thought her by this time far on her way. The maid was expostulating with the soldier on guard. It was her affianced lover, Albert Le Ferrailleur. She seemed bent upon something which he was denying her. Why was she dallying thus? Did she not know that every moment might mean De Bersier's life?

The countess was on the point of leaning from the window and calling to her maid, when the latter turned suddenly and walked to the sun-dial near the moat. No sooner had she glanced at the dial than she started violently, and instantly ran at full speed into the castle.

Full of anxiety, uncertain what such mysterious behaviour might mean, Yvonne turned from the window and stood in the middle of the room, waiting — listening — scarce breathing.

In a few moments there were quick steps in the hall. The door was flung open, and Gilberte, flushed

and panting, rushed into the room. Without stopping, she snatched the green scarf from the dressing-table, and ran into the eastern tower, crying:

"Noon, noon, — the baron!"

For a moment, Yvonne stood petrified with complete surprise. Then, realizing her purpose, followed her maid with the speed of despair.

It was too late. Gilberte's arm was frantically waving from the appointed window, and from her extended hand the green scarf was fluttering.

Yvonne did not stop to think of explaining such an act. Crazed at thought of what that signal meant, she leaped savagely upon the girl, and, dragging her from the window, struck her again and again.

"Wretched woman!" she cried. "Are you, too, in league with all the powers of evil?"

Without a word, Gilberte sank into a chair, and, biting her lips, looked up from under her brows with silent, sullen defiance.

Just then there was a step outside the door. Yvonne started. She heard her husband's voice.

"You need not trouble to send your woman again," he said; "she cannot corrupt even her lover. Not a soul may leave the castle upon any pretext. Your lover may *enter* when and how *he* chooses, but he *leaves* when and how *I* wish."

There was no further sound, save the retreating

steps of the count. The countess was left alone with Gilberte and her own thoughts.

"Great God!" she whispered. "It is a trap! A trap into which they will let Henri enter, but from which he cannot escape alive. Nothing can save him, — Armand would laugh at the truth. And now to crown all, De Pompelac — "

She stopped. Her head swam with the delight of a triumphant thought. De Pompelac was coming. He would walk into the trap and — yes — yes; he, not Henri, would feel her husband's vengeance. He, the trapper, would be caught; the vile calumniator would be taken for the cuckoo who had found the window. The joy of this thought for a moment overpowered all other feelings, and Yvonne smiled.

At this moment her eyes caught those of Gilberte. The maid looked quickly away.

Alas! What had she done! Gilberte it was whose quick wit, upon discovering the trap, had seized the propitious moment for leading De Pompelac into it! And her mistress had cruelly struck her. Blows had been the sole reward of her fidelity and quick wit! Overcome by remorse, Yvonne fell on her knees beside the girl, whom, in her blind injustice, she had struck.

"Gilberte! Gilberte! You have brought me vengeance — preserved my brother. Oh, forgive —

forgive your mistress whose heart is broken — whose hope, and life, and love are wrecked!"

Weeping, she hid her face in Gilberte's lap, forgetting her own rank and her maid's station, remembering only the injustice done to her devotion.

Gilberte said nothing, but the countess felt a soft hand touch her hair, and it made her heart less heavy.

CHAPTER VII.

RETRIBUTION

A STEALTHY step and a gentle knock at the door brought the countess to her feet. She glanced at Gilberte. The maid's look was as hard as ever, but there was no time to think of this. It was De Pompelac who had knocked. De Pompelac! He was prompt!

Seating herself beside the window, the countess pointed in silence to the door. Gilberte opened it, and De Pompelac stepped in quietly.

The baron bowed, and began the interview with his insolence of the day before.

"Upon my word! Is this the Castle of Silence, madame? My own is the only voice I have heard since I entered. The guards at the gates looked at me curiously, but in silence. The chamberlain, on my asking for you, bowed without a word, and brought me to your door. I found my way to this cosy bower alone, of course, for they could not imagine that I had business here."

He paused at length. But there was no answer.

Then his manner grew more offensive as he felt the countess's cool gaze upon him.

"Come, come, my lady!" he exclaimed. "Give me the news I crave. Your voice I know to be good, and what you have to say is interesting," and the fellow seated himself uninvited.

"Go on, baron," Yvonne replied, "go on. I shall never have the privilege, after to-day, of seeing your face, or of hearing your voice."

He moved uneasily in his seat.

"The compliment is equivocal, my lady," he said. "Would you object to explaining it?"

"Not in the least, monsieur. The requests of the condemned are always granted, I believe — when reasonable."

He laughed without mirth, and looked at Gilberte. There he got only a sullen glance, and he turned to the countess again with inquiry in his eye.

"What did you suppose my lord would do when he got that parchment this morning, Monsieur de Pompelac?" she asked.

"This morning?" he said. "You mean to-morrow, countess, to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" she exclaimed, now puzzled in her turn. "Why, he got it this morning, baron. I know it, for he showed it to me."

De Pompelac leaped to his feet with an oath.

"This morning!" he cried. "Then that fool of a Gernac left it on his table one day too soon! My God! but —" Then, leaning forward with a white face of terror — "But, countess, — then if he got it, why am I here?"

"Be seated, I beg," she replied.

He dropped into his chair, and turned upon her a face full of anxiety.

"The fact is simply this, monsieur. This room in the eastern tower having been rendered suspicious to my lord by your charming missive, the count is convinced that he has only to watch this room to find the cuckoo — my lover — do you understand?" She raised her voice as she ended her sentence.

The baron's eyes turned quickly from side to side, and great drops stood out on his forehead.

"Then that signal!" he faltered. "Those guards, this reception —"

"All a trap — yes!" she answered, slowly.

He leaped to his feet and felt for his sword. He knew that to offer words to Du Beaulieu would be like whistling against a hurricane.

"Great God! I am lost!" he muttered.

"It may interest you to know," Yvonne went on, "that only a few moments ago the Count du Beaulieu announced to me that my lover, the cuckoo,

you know, would leave my presence when and *how* my husband pleased."

"He will kill me — kill without a word!" groaned the baron, looking about in despair.

Just then the steps of a number of men were heard in the corridor.

With a muffled cry, De Pompelac fell in a heap before the countess, and sought to embrace her feet.

"Save me — for Christ's sake, save — hide me — oh, help me — help!"

His words were but a moaning breath. He dared not cry out for fear of being heard. She drew back from his craven touch, and her breath came hard as she gazed down upon him.

As he grovelled there in abject terror at her feet, the steps came nearer still, and then halted — at the door.

Death was there for both, she believed, but the woman, in her innocence, stood to face it, while this wretch begged for mercy from her he had wronged.

And then once more Gilberte interfered to seemingly thwart her mistress.

Touching De Pompelac's shoulder, she beckoned him to follow her. He arose, and before Yvonne's astonished eyes, the still sullen girl opened the secret trap in the fireplace, and pointed to the hidden stair. With a gasp of joy, De Pompelac leaped to

the chimney, and, just as the door opened to admit the count, the trap closed upon the baron.

Du Beaulieu stood before his wife, his face perfectly impassive, gazing into her eyes, which met his without flinching.

"So, madame," he said, "you thought me ignorant of that trick, did you?" He advanced slowly and calmly toward the trap.

As he did so, the countess caught sight of Gilberte's face. With her eyes fixed upon the chimney, she was smiling with a look of triumphant hate in which no trace of sullenness remained.

The count walked directly to the secret door and drew back the panel. Then, raising a commanding finger, —

"Listen!" he exclaimed.

While one might have counted ten there came back only the fugitive's footsteps, faint and muffled. Suddenly a piercing cry of terror and pain was heard.

There was a moment's pause, and then Du Beaulieu broke the silence.

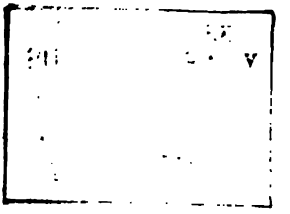
"Bring it here, Bazin," he cried.

Turning, and approaching the countess, he continued:

"My lady, you shall see your work, and then —" he stopped short.

Bravely the wronged woman returned his gaze. Puzzled and angry, her husband turned again to the open passage just as a stalwart man-at-arms emerged, dragging after him the body of the Baron de Pompelac.

"DRAGGING AFTER HIM THE BODY OF THE BARON DE POMPELAC"



CHAPTER VIII.

THE WINGED HELMET

(An Extract from Gilberte's Manuscript)

WHAT follows is a translation of a portion of the written account prepared many years afterward by Gilberte, the Countess du Beaulieu's maid.

When I opened the secret trap for De Pompelac that day, I well knew that I was sending him to certain death. Albert Le Ferrailleur had told me where Bazin was posted and what his orders were.

True, I might have remained idle, and have left my lord to strike the fatal blow himself. But my lady had struck me unjustly, and, in my resentment, I was willing to make her believe for a moment that her enemy had escaped. May God forgive me for it. Never again have I consciously done anything to grieve my beloved mistress.

Bazin had laid down the corpse at a sign from his master, and my mistress was gazing into the dead face with a proud indifference.

Death lay before her. At any moment she mi
share it. Yet, in the wreck of all her life had be
she stood there, proud, brave, fearless. At least
traducer was dead!

On the other side of the body stood my lord.
stared at my lady's face with knitted brows.
cold rage was giving way to perplexity.

I glanced from one to the other and read the tr
My lord had not a brilliant mind, but he was
blind. And no man with eyes could read on
lady's face anything but a cold, proud courage.

I could almost hear my lord ask himself, "D
a woman look thus upon a dead lover's face?"

My mistress broke the silence. She raised
eyes to her husband's, and her look slowly chan
to a calm despair. She dropped her hands to
side, and said:

"And now, my lord, strike!"

But he only stepped back a pace, and sank slo
into a chair, pointing my lady to another as he
so. She did not move.

"What is this?" he said, in a low, measured t
"Have you changed lovers overnight, mada
Do you love perchance by the day?"

With a low cry my lady covered her face with
hands, and drew back, shame stricken. The in
was horrible.

Oh! had I dared — had I dared — I would have leaped upon him and beaten him with my fists, lord and count though he were!

It was at this moment that Bazin stepped forward. He did not speak, but in his extended hand he held something white.

My lord saw the act, and exclaimed, roughly:

"Well, sirrah! What's that?"

"A handkerchief, my lord. I found it near the outer door of the secret passage."

The count grasped it eagerly, and moved quickly toward the light. He had to pass close to my mistress, who shrank away from him and came rapidly to my side.

"My brother's handkerchief!" she whispered, very low.

My heart bounded.

"Oh, madame, you are saved! Do you understand?"

She stopped me.

"They will kill him; my lord cannot shield him if —"

Her husband turned from the window. His face was terrible with a bitter, hateful joy.

"I thought you mad, madame," he said, "but I now understand. This handkerchief is not De Pompelac's. This crest is not his."

"His crest! Oh, God!"

My lady caught my arm, and leaned upon me heavily.

Her exclamation redoubled his rage. He made a step forward, then stopped, seeming to govern himself by a great effort.

"Ha! So the thrust has reached you! This poor victim here fell into another's trap. Your cold heart exulted over his corpse. Your lover was safe and you were happy!"

Then, holding out the handkerchief:

"But here — here is the truth! Here, in this corner — see, your lover's crest — a winged helmet — embroidered in dainty silk. Upon my honour, the symbol is appropriate. The visor down to hide the betrayer's face — the wings! Why, by these he reached the window of your tower. The wings! The cuckoo's wings!" and, dashing the kerchief to the floor, he turned away with a great wild laugh.

My mistress was sobbing upon my shoulder.

"What is it? What does it mean?" she whispered again and again.

And, indeed, what was the explanation? This was no part of the De Bersier arms. Neither of us knew what family owned a winged helmet for a crest.

My lady's brother never owned such a handker-

chief as this. Nor could the Baron de Pompelac have dropped it. It was found near the *outer* entrance to the passage, and the baron had only entered it from the room we stood in. And yet the scent was fresh upon it. Who, then, had dropped it?

But we had scant time for solving puzzles.

My lord, ashamed of yielding to his passion while his men stood by, had resumed a calmer mien. But his words came sharp and crisp. The nervous energy of rage was in his quick, uneven movements.

He stooped, and, raising up the handkerchief, exclaimed:

"This rag has changed the course of my further action. I swore to kill you two together here — here on the scene of your crime. My oath binds me. You, madame, shall live a few days more, until I catch the winged helmet and bring you face to face — "

He stopped abruptly, seeing my mistress still sobbing on my shoulder, seeming not to heed him.

"Pierre!" he cried. "Take that woman away! My lady, will you deign to listen to your sentence?"

One of the men-at-arms, who had entered the room with the count, stepped toward us.

But the countess raised her head and stayed the fellow with an imperious gesture. Then she turned

to my lord, and, throwing herself on her knees before him, —

"Oh, kill me, kill me now!" she cried. "Your respect, your love, are gone. You, my husband, have dishonoured, insulted me! Why should I live? Strike now, and end this nightmare. See, I am ready. I —"

"But I am not!" he thundered. Then, more quietly, he said:

"You, madame, shall go to the Carmelite Convent. Save your soul, if it be not too late. As for this knight of the winged helmet — trust me — I will find him. Your maid shall tell me his name."

"Never!" I cried, springing forward.

My first thought was that he dared to doubt my faithfulness to her. Then I saw my folly — knew what confirmation of his jealousy lay in that one word. Miserably, weakly, I spoke on:

"My lord, I know nothing of it. As I hope for salvation hereafter, it is true, I never even heard of that crest before!"

"That will do!" the count broke in. "Take her away to her chamber, Pierre, and lock her in. I have means to force her to speak." He pointed to the door.

Again the soldier advanced. I stepped aside.

"Don't touch me!" I cried. "I'll go alone."

I walked to the door, Pierre following. I stopped upon the threshold and looked back.

My mistress, still on her knees, turned a white face to me, and in her eyes I read a prayer.

"God's blessing on you, dear, dear mistress! Trust me — trust me as yourself!"

Then Pierre stepped between us, and I slipped out to avoid his touch, carrying with me the last sight of my dear lady's face, and in those eyes, thank God, a beam of faith and farewell.

A few minutes later I saw from my windows my lady's coach, attended by four horsemen, driving swiftly out of the castle gate. My mistress was being taken to her prison, — the Carmelite Convent of St. Cecilia.

CHAPTER IX.

A CONVERT IS MADE

ALL that day I was left alone. My chamber was too high, my door too stout, for escape to be feasible. My thoughts were far from pleasant.

The count had spoken of means to force my secret from me. From another these words would have meant but one thing — the torture! I shuddered at the unknown horrors in that word.

But the Count du Beaulieu was singular in this, — that when he was himself, sympathy and mercy were his religion. Even to his animals his gentleness was marvellous — the more so that his strong, stern face was an outward sign ill fitting these woman's manners.

From him, then, the threat of force was quite uncertain. The torture-chamber was but a tradition at Beaulieu.

Yet who could tell how far his mad, blind jealousy would carry him? Would he not lose all mercy —

turn to iron — in his determined quest for the name of the man he hated?

What could I do? It was easy to *say* that nothing would wring the name of De Bersier from me. It was easy to *mean* it. But torture! What was it? What hideous torments did the word imply! Was it in nature to bear the awful thing and not pour out one's inmost soul to buy one gasp of ease? I wrung my hands and paced up and down in dread.

Then came another thought. Even did I yield; if I told the truth, what then? My lord well knew the De Bersier arms. He knew that the winged helmet was not theirs. He would laugh at me and bid them turn the screw once more.

Ah, the pit was deeper than we had dreamed, my lady and I. This strange mystery — this unknown crest — was a mountain weight upon us. No word, no act, not the truth, not evasion, — nothing, — nothing availed! The devil of jealous hate in my master's breast held us in his power. Only God could foresee the end.

In my agony I knelt before my wooden crucifix and prayed — prayed and wept through half a day of growing frantic fear.

The sun was setting when I heard a heavy step

without. I rose, my face wet, my eyes red, and faced the door. How my heart beat!

I had expected to see my lord. To my surprise there entered — Le Ferrailleur! He was carrying my supper.

He entered, set his tray upon a bench, and then closed the door behind him.

When he turned to face me again, he seemed confused. It was the first time he had ever entered my bedroom. He was my lover — yes. But he knew me well and had always kept his distance.

His first words were a half-apology.

"I came by order," he began. "My lord sent me with your supper — and —" He stopped.

I dried my eyes and seated myself upon my bench far from him, near the window.

"And?" I queried.

"I have a message — when you have eaten."

I made a gesture of disgust.

"You may speak now," I replied, "I cannot eat."

"I thought so," he said. Then he started forward impetuously — "Gilberte, you must speak!" he exclaimed.

His voice was stern — his face threatening.

I rose to meet his mood.

"Speak?" I exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Tell the truth. Give the villain's name! Oh, I've loved the countess as I loved the Virgin. I've given you my heart, girl! And now — she — you — " He turned away and threw up his hands with a gesture of despair.

Oh, I was angry! The varlet! He dared doubt my mistress! He spoke of love for me in one breath with a denial of her virtue!

"You great dolt!" I cried, savagely. "Clod as dull as your blind master! Is this your message? Is it he or you — the master bully or his poor puppet — that dares to bid me speak?"

He cut me short at this, grasping my wrist and coming closer to me, but I did not flinch.

"Silence!" he shouted. "My master — your master — sent me hither. He is merciful, and you revile him! He might have forced you to speak, but he knew of our love, and sent me to woo the truth!"

Then, dropping my hand:

"Oh, woman, woman!" he cried, and clenched his fists. "Confess — confess, and pray to God to forgive you! But tell the truth! Give up his name. The proof is clear!"

At this I caught his two hands in mine. I forced my whole will into my eyes — my lips. I cowed him into silence with the pressure of my gaze.

"Albert," I said, slowly, "I am still Gilberte. It was I who put my hand in yours that early morning, and said 'yes.' I it was who took the little chain you gave me, and it still hides in my breast. It was I whose cheek you kissed, — and I hoped — yes, still hope — to be your wife. With these sweet memories between us, tell me, do you believe I would lie before God and his Son?"

He drew back, half-awed, and shook his head.

I dropped his hands and turned to my crucifix.

"Now listen to me!" I continued, solemnly. "By the mystery of God's Trinity — with my hand on the Crucified Son, and in the sight of his virgin mother — I swear to you that my lady Du Beaulieu has no lover but her husband, and that I know nothing of the winged helmet, and if I speak not truth may my perjured soul descend to hell!"

Le Ferrailleur crossed himself — awestruck.

"I believe thee!" he whispered. "I must!"

"You believe! Oh, Albert! Not only for *my* honour's sake believe, but for hers. Hold fast your lady's honour! Your master's wife is too true, too pure, too high for even doubt to touch! A devil set a snare of lies, Albert, — a fiend's black plot, — and we are all his victim's. But he himself was caught. He took one step too many, and Bazin killed him."

Albert sprang to his feet with a cry.

"De Pompelac! He! What do you mean?"

Then I swore him to secrecy, and told him the truth, omitting only what I had still no right to tell, the exact nature of De Bersier's mission and his expected return for the scroll.

On completing this account, I thought to find my despair reflected in his. To my surprise, he only breathed relief.

"With my lady innocent all must come out well," he stoutly maintained. "To be sure, the snarl is a bad one, but we've just one thing to do now — get you out of here."

"But the count — "

"Oh, we'll not ask him."

Albert stepped to the window, and, putting out his head, looked first to the ground and then up to the roof.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he drew in his head. "A rope from the roof to-night, then out through the servant's wing. That is the trick. You shall hide in the wine-cellar until we get a chance to smuggle you over the drawbridge."

I shook my head.

"All this is none too easy in a house so full of servants and men-at-arms," I said.

"Pooh!" he rejoined, confidently. "With my strength and your wits — "

"But my lord's plans!" I broke in, my old fears returning. "You heard his threat — to force the truth from me. Oh, Albert, would he, would he — "

"No, no, no!" and Albert shook his head violently. "Why, lass, you know our master's weakness. He cannot hurt a fly without turning white. Of course, in fair fight — "

"Ah, but now the demons are in him, my friend. To know the name of his supposed enemy — "

I broke off in alarm.

Some one was approaching the door.

Instantly I seized the dishes and emptied their contents from the window. Then, sitting, pretended to be finishing my meal.

CHAPTER X.

GILBERTE'S SENTENCE

THE door opened, and my lord stood on the threshold.

I stood up and curtsied. The dusk was deepening, but I could see that the count's stern face was marked with a sorrow that looked like the mask of age.

For the first time, I pitied him. After all, what was his jealousy but the curdling of a great love's sweetness!

"Well, Le Ferrailleur?" said the master.

"She knows nothing, my lord."

The count folded his arms, and his eyes seemed luminous in the twilight as he gazed at me.

"Have you told her the alternative?"

I did not give Albert time to reply.

"How can I tell what I do not know, my lord?"

He answered, bitterly:

"So my mercy has borne no fruit. I thought perhaps this man might bring you to your senses.

But I was a fool. Like mistress — like maid. Wantons and liars both!"

Albert stepped forward, but, like a flash, I stepped before him. His sentiments must not be betrayed. So I spoke freely, boldly, to divert my master's mind in case he had seen that menacing step.

"My lord, you speak in anger, and your words are empty. Your wife (may God guard her) is an angel. It is the devil who urges you —"

"Stop the hussy's impudent chatter!" the count broke in. Then, turning his back, —

"Follow me, and bring the woman with you," he said.

I turned and whispered hurriedly to Albert:

"Hide your true feelings. Seem what you were before. It is our only hope that you should see me again. Remember!"

Then I followed my lord, and Albert came after.

Down the winding stairs we slowly passed, and on through the gloomy corridors leading at length to the wider landing at the head of the main staircase. The castle of Beaulieu is a true fort, and the winding halls and thick stone stair-rails were cleverly designed for desperate defence to the last extremity.

We moved on down the great stairs, wide enough for four men-at-arms abreast to wield their weapons, down to the common hall.

Here we found assembled the few chosen men-at-arms who had followed their master to the eastern tower.

As we descended the stairs, Albert managed to whisper to me:

"These are all who know why my lady left. We have all sworn by the Host not to betray the secret, nor to tell what became of De Pompelac."

I could only find time to murmur, "So much the better," when the count turned and faced me.

"Now, woman, one more chance you shall have. Tell me whose crest is embroidered here."

He drew the mysterious handkerchief from his pocket, and showed it to me.

Five pairs of eyes scanned me curiously from the line of men near the chimney.

"My lord," I said, "I swear to you that I do not know."

With a frown the count said, quickly:

"Foolish woman! I have but to inquire of the college of heralds and the owner of this crest will be revealed. But my time is short. I must know now. And I *will*."

"But I do not know —" I began.

He turned from me impatiently, and addressed his men.

"Which of you can handle the tools of the question?" he asked.

The question! The torture!

I tottered a moment under the shock, then clenched my hands and my teeth, and stood erect, defiant, looking at the men.

No one answered.

I thought the count looked relieved.

"Bazin," he said, "do you saddle Cæsar, and ride at once to Thiers. Seek out the secretary of the corporation, and tell him I wish the town executioner and his assistant to follow you hither at once."

Bazin bowed, and moved at once toward the door.

"Hold! Before you leave, learn this, and it is for you all. Your oaths of secrecy extend to the fate of this woman here. From this time on she is dead to all men, — as dead as her victim, the Baron de Pompelac. Remember this; and now, go!"

As Bazin stepped into the outer court, the count made a sign to two of the men remaining, who, stepping to each side of me, urged me toward an inner door.

Something within me must have failed beneath the strain, for the terrors of my position seemed dreamlike — only half real.

I seemed to see as though a double of myself led

onward through a dimly lighted passage, and up a short flight of steps.

The group paused before a stout iron door, while one of my guards turned a key in a rusty, screaming lock. The door opened, some one pushed me forward into the black emptiness, and then the last ray of light failed as the iron gate clanged behind me.

Mechanically I stepped forward and met an obstruction. It was a hard wooden bench or bed. I cared not which, but flung myself down, and lost all consciousness at once, utterly broken — overcome with anxious weariness.

CHAPTER XI.

A RIDE THROUGH THE NIGHT

LEAVING Gilberte to sleep in her prison-chamber, let us turn for awhile from her own account of that night's events to follow two other actors in the drama of Beaulieu.

Bazin was saddling his horse in the stables behind the castle, finding his way by no light save that of the stars and one yellow ray that pierced the black mass of the castle wall.

The single beam came from a narrow stone cell in the soldiers' quarters. This was Le Ferrailleur's bedroom, for, being an officer of the count's bodyguard, he was permitted to enjoy the dignity of a separate apartment.

By the light of a torch, smeared with pitch, which was jammed between two stones in the wall, Le Ferrailleur was counting some coins which he took from a flat canvas bag.

He had secured leave from the count to visit his

mother's home for a last farewell before the departure for Italy.

He sat sidewise upon his rough wooden bed covered with coarse blankets, the bag on his knee and the smoky glare from directly above him glinting on each small coin as he turned it and felt it before adding it to the little heap beside him.

When he had thus counted his entire hoard, he shook the bag out carefully to assure himself that naught remained within it. With a grunt he poured the coins back into the simple purse, and tucked the purse securely beneath his broad belt.

Then, just as Bazin was leading his horse out on to the road skirting the castle to the drawbridge, the yellow ray was extinguished, and he was left to the stars alone.

He picked his way slowly, leading his steed with care, lest, by mishap, the two should walk into the moat. The murky water, overgrown with vegetation, was indistinguishable from the earth that bordered it.

The iron shoes clanged on the sounding bridge, then seemed to whisper again in a soft "thud, thud," and Bazin, leaping into his saddle, began his long night ride to Thiers.

Turning to the right on a gentle canter, he looked

about with a sense of luxury, and breathed deep of the evening fragrance.

He dipped into a hollow, and a line of trees rose in inky tracery against the sky. He heard the friendly prattle of a brook, the drum of hoofs upon a tiny bridge, and then he entered a short street in the village, already silent, save for an infant's cry, half-heard in passing, and the uneasy croon of roosting fowls. Then came a sudden blackness, a smothered echo of horse's footfalls, and the first stretch of forest had enclosed him.

Bazin's first expansion of feeling could not long survive the dense gloom that was now about him. His mind returned as with a shock to the nature of his errand, and he struck his thigh with a muttered imprecation.

How hope to follow this simple soldier's thoughts? The darkness about him scarce gave his horse knowledge of where lay the road. How, then, can we, less gifted in night-seeing, hope to follow and read the rider's mind in his face — in his gestures?

We can only record that, as he emerged from the first stretch of woodland, the stars shone on naught but an impassive soldier, sitting his horse as though a part of it.

Cantering steadily, not hurrying, but never slacking pace, man and beast swept onward past field

and orchard, pasture and farmstead, while above them curved the sky, a colourless deep, star-pointed.

More than half the road to Thiers had been left behind when Bazin was suddenly startled from his thoughtless, even progress. Faint as a breath, almost, came a sound that might have been an echo of his horse's steps but that it fell not in their rhythm. Was it a mere fancy? He turned about, but could see nothing.

"Pooh!" he muttered, "I am getting sleepy, and my ears are playing tricks."

Five minutes later, as he cantered over soft earth, faint but distinct came a sound as of distant galloping on gravel.

This time he stopped quickly, and, turning his horse to the east, listened, and peered into the night, every nerve tense. But the sound had ceased.

"Humph!" he grunted; and, with a pull and a prick of his spur, he was off again on his way.

Shortly after this he came to the foot of a long slope. Here, with a sudden resolve, he once more drew up his horse, and turned to survey the road behind him.

Only the edge of the ridge he had crossed was visible, a black border to a starlit sky, paling at the approach of the moon.

Yet, stay! What was that formless shadow on the sky-line? A tree group? Surely!

Bazin turned, and gathered his bridle tighter in his hand, then looked back once more.

The mysterious shadow had disappeared.

The soldier straightened up with a jump. For an instant he was on the point of turning back. If danger were there, he would face it. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"No time for a fight. I have my errand. If the fellow means me mischief, he must catch me, and that —"

Bazin chuckled, leaned forward, and, digging his spurs into the flanks of his steed, set off at a wild gallop, heedless of safety, thinking but of speed.

In less than due time the messenger reached the little town, and here, slackening his speed, let his trembling horse trot quietly through the main street.

CHAPTER XII.

BAZIN'S ERRAND

AFTER making two or three mistakes on his way, Bazin was dismounting at last before the door of Messer Pignon, Secretary of the Corporation of Thiers.

There was, of course, much pounding upon the lower door before the inmates could be aroused. A number of curious heads were craned out of neighbouring windows ere at length the small iron shutter in the upper panel opened, and the gleam of a candle was seen.

"Who is it?" came a voice from within.

"A messenger from the Count Armand du Beaulieu."

The panel closed, and, after much creaking of bolts and clanking of chains, the door was partly opened. A puckered face, surmounted by a dishevelled crop of white hair, peered out cautiously, while

sleepy eyes surveyed the dusty messenger critically, doubtfully.

"Come, come, old owl!" said Bazin, impatiently. "Have done with delay. Let me in, and tell your master I'm here."

"Owl, eh!" The old fellow loosened the last chain as he spoke. "Owl, he says! Well, he looks like a falcon to my way of thinking." And at this the stout door was swung wide open.

Bazin entered, and dropped upon a wooden bench. He was thirsty, and must humour the man. So he laughed, and clapped his thigh.

"Well said, comrade! You've a subtle wit of your own, I see. Both of us birds of prey, eh? The falcon flies high and goes hungry, but the owl is wiser, — he knows where to find his next meal — what!" and the young soldier winked slyly up at his senior.

The dry face crackled into a smile. This flattery from a soldier pleased the old servant. His wit had been complimented. This was true discrimination. It deserved a reward.

"A meal, is it?" he queried, rubbing his bony hands. "Aye, and a bottle, lad, which is better!"

He shuffled into the next apartment, candle in hand. There was a clucking and gurgling that seemed to parch the listening soldier's lips. Then

the old man returned with a well-filled beaker in his hand.

"You shall give me news of this," he remarked, using the quaint idiom of his race. "Drink and rest while I go to the master."

"The falcon drinks to your longer life!" said Bazin, taking the cup and promptly hiding his face within the ample brim.

When he lowered the cup with a satisfied sigh, he was alone and in darkness.

There was a subdued bustle and much whispering up-stairs. Bazin emptied his cup, and peered about in vain, for the darkness was complete. Then he settled back, yawned, nodded, started up, nodded again, and, as though a moment afterward, found himself rubbing his eyes in a brightly lighted hall.

He sprang to his feet to find that a half-score of candles had been lighted around the wall, and that the worshipful secretary was standing before him, fully dressed, scanning him curiously.

"Your pardon, bourgeois," muttered the soldier. "I must have been napping."

"Quite natural, too, my friend," said Messer Pignon, seating himself.

He was a cheerful, busy little man, with a tendency to obesity, only kept under control by the con-

stant activity imposed by a restless spirit. He was clad entirely in black, save for a ruffled collar standing out like a platter around his neck, and this was of snowy whiteness and formidable stiffness, — a worthy guarantee of his dame's efficient management.

"You have been riding hard and far?" the little man questioned.

"From Beaulieu, in four hours."

"Whew! No wonder you are weary! Can you not rest awhile, or is your business too urgent?"

"I must return at once. My lord will not have delay. I have come for the town executioner."

Pignon sat up a little straighter at this.

"Indeed! Pray, what has happened? Some conspiracy, some — " He broke off, paused, and then, standing up, he continued, nervously:

"Troublous times! Words won't do, eh? Monseigneur de Bourbon — secrets — enemies everywhere — eh? What?"

Bazin was scowling as he thought of Gilberte. He answered, roughly:

"You are right, bourgeois. A soldier does not chatter — he obeys. I came for the town executioner."

The little secretary blushed, and turned away busily to hide his discomfiture.

"Ho, Pascal! Hie, there, Pierre, — Gaston! Bring my cloak, — my boots, — run out and saddle the white mare. Bustle, now; run!"

The servants scattered, and a sharp voice floated down from above:

"Jacques, are you going out?"

"Yes, my dear."

"What! At this time of night! What does it mean? Can you not send a servant? What am I to do here alone?"

"Why, there's no danger, Claire. This is of state importance, wife. I must go myself. Discretion is required."

There was an impatient sniff from above.

"Discretion, eh? Where do you expect to find it?"

No reply was possible to this, so the good man trotted into the dining-hall, while Bazin hid a manifest smile and a yawn behind a dusty hand.

The secretary returned with another cup of wine for the soldier, who received it graciously.

"Thank you, bourgeois. Ah, here are your boots. No time to lose, you know."

He slowly absorbed the inspiriting liquor, while Pierre and Pascal knelt at their master's feet, adjusting his boots and spurs.

Again came a call from up-stairs:

"When shall you be back?"

"Impossible to say, dear — Ouch, not so hard, Pascal — I'm going to Beaulieu with —"

Bazin stopped him with a quick gesture, and roared out, promptly:

"With me, madame!"

"You! Who are you?"

"I am Discretion," he cried, and then roared with laughter, while Pierre and Pascal chuckled.

Messer Pignon, though smiling himself at this, cuffed both his servants, and then stood up and put on his hat.

From above there came no reply. A dignified silence was deemed the best rebuke.

It was one o'clock in the morning when two horsemen wound their way through crooked streets, over dusty, unpaved earth to a small square where stood a stone cross. It was Bazin and the secretary.

They stopped before a narrow house with a sharp gable facing the street. Every window was dark. Evidently the inmates were asleep, as befitted the hour.

They must have been sleepers of a sturdy fashion, truly, for many were the blows upon the door, and short, indeed, Messer Pignon's official temper, when at length the door was opened.

"What enchanted potion have you all partaken of, in God's name? Is this the Castle of the Seven Sleepers? Speak, varlet! Where are your master and mistress?"

The man who had opened the door bowed low, and uttered confused apologies.

"Ta! ta! ta!" cried the irate magistrate. "A truce to excuses. Get up-stairs, knave, and tell your master I am here, and wish his services at once!"

"Master is done up, your worship. He has a humour in his teeth," said the servant. "Shall I send the mistress?"

"Ay, send her down that we be not kept waiting. No, leave that light, villain! Would you desert us in darkness?"

The little man sat down, rapping his boots with his whip. Scarce had the servant set foot on the first step, however, when the visitor leaped again to his feet, and called, angrily:

"And while you're up there, tell your master to make the best of his illness and humours. He must prepare to come out with me, and at the quickest, too, d'ye hear?"

Bazin seemed perplexed at this news of illness.

"Hath the executioner no assistant?" he asked.

"He has, but the fellow is away on I know not

what errand. But have no fear, our good friend Sebastian is probably not so far gone that he cannot tie a very pretty hangman's knot."

"It's not for a hanging my lord wants him," growled the soldier.

"Oh-o! the question, eh? That is different. He should not be down in the mouth for that work. A tidy hand and some ingenuity are often of use in these cases. But, there! If it be the question, Sebastian may need some tools — the boot, the thumbscrews, eh?"

"No, no," said Bazin, roughly, shaking his head. "We have a lot of devil's traps in the castle, they say."

"Ah, yes!" quoth Pignon, with a pitying shrug. "Old-fashioned methods, I presume, slow and clumsy. But you country people are conservative and backward in all things. Now, here — "

But at this juncture the executioner's wife appeared and interrupted this dissertation on the torture, its theory and practice.

The good woman curtsied deeply to each of her visitors, separately. She seemed perturbed and nervous.

Pignon nodded carelessly.

"Well, good wife," he said, "where is Sebastian? Here is my lord of Beaulieu's man-at-arms,

who has ridden hard to fetch him on a little business matter. He and I are needed, it seems, to persuade some obstinate fellow to open his mouth."

"It's a woman," said Bazin.

Pignon held up both hands.

"Lord, Lord! So much the worse!" he cried. "I hope your husband's illness is not serious, dame, for he has a big task ahead."

"It's only his teeth, your Worship," replied the woman, with a second curtsey. "The humour has risen to his teeth, and he's so in pain he'll not speak a word, sir."

"Oh, well! So his hand be powerful, we can well spare his tongue. It's the wench's voice we would fain hear, eh?" and the little man laughed loud at his own wit.

At this moment Sebastian was seen descending the stairs. Enveloped in a cloak of dark brown cloth, he wore a broad-brimmed hat, and his face was swathed in bandages.

"Ah, Sebastian! Mother of heaven! What a figure of pity! Can you ride with us to-night, man? what?"

The executioner nodded affirmatively, but did not speak.

"So much the better, then, for ride we must, and a good bit, too. Where is your horse?"

Sebastian pointed toward the stable, and intimated by signs that, if his visitors would set out, he would soon catch up with them.

"Good!" cried Pignon, starting toward the door. "Let us be off, master soldier. You know the road to Beaulieu, Sebastian?"

A nod was the answer.

"Then good night, dame," and the worshipful secretary passed out to where the servant was holding the two horses.

As Pignon and his companion rode slowly toward the town gate, Bazin remarked:

"It occurs to me, bourgeois, that his lordship made no mention of you. I was to fetch the executioner, not the corporation secretary."

Pignon drew rein, abashed.

"Does my lord Du Beaulieu intend to conduct the examination in person?" he asked.

It was Bazin's turn to hesitate. He knew his master too well to suppose he would wish to witness the gruesome spectacle.

"No," he replied, slowly. "I had not thought of that."

"Ah, then, I must go, to act as examining clerk, you know," and the little burgher spurred on well pleased. Evidently his curiosity was fully equal to his softness of heart.

The two had scarce passed the town gate when a third horseman joined them. It was the executioner.

The sun was well up when the three men reached Beaulieu, where they were met at the drawbridge by a man-at-arms who was watching for their approach.

He led them to the stable, and when they dismounted he announced that the secretary and executioner must remain there all day, as the count had just been joined by a party of noblemen with whom he was in conference.

"Well, but — look here!" expostulated the secretary, gazing upon his mean surroundings with offended dignity. "Why can't we come into the castle, my friend?"

The soldier chuckled as he moved toward the door.

"Your presence is not to be known to the castle folk, bourgeois. Let that suffice. Besides, I'll bring you food and wine in half an hour. You can amuse yourselves with that."

Bazin and his comrade left the stable and shut the door behind them, locking it securely.

The amazed and injured magistrate plumped down upon a three-legged stool.

"Well — in the devil's name!" he exclaimed.

The executioner said nothing, but merely curled himself up like a dog upon a heap of straw and soon was snoring as though he had not slept for twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TORTURE-CHAMBER

(Resuming Gilberte's Manuscript)

I SLEPT long and dreamlessly, for the excitement had sapped my energy to the utmost.

When I awoke I lay on my back and gazed upward quietly, curiously. My half-sleeping spirit queried listlessly, "What is this? How came I here?"

A stone vault overhung me, lighted by a dim gray shaft of light that seemed to have passed over ice, it looked so chill. A damp smell as of mouldy wood was in the air I breathed.

At least I was not in my own chamber.

The stillness was complete, a vague fear began to creep over me. I dreaded to turn my head, to take my eyes from those overhanging stones.

Stealthily, as though some being were present whose watch I must avoid, I moved my hands out-

ward over the hard boards on which I lay. My couch seemed a mere bench. On which side was the wall?

My fingers reached the edge on both sides of me at once. My bed was a narrow one indeed. I paused as if in fear of that unseen presence.

Then my hands were outstretched farther. Still they touched nothing.

With a sudden movement I extended my arms at full length on both sides. Nothing! Empty space only!

With a half-defiant feeling, I swung about and sat upright. My head swam amid dull yellow lights as I shut my eyes dizzily. I was faint with hunger, my lips were dried together. I had fasted twenty-four hours, perhaps more, for what knew I of the time?

My feet swung clear of the floor. This puzzled me, for no bench could stand so high.

As the first dizzy feeling subsided, I opened my eyes and gazed about me.

I saw a large stone room five yards square at least, I should think. A few feet in front of me was a thick iron door by which I had entered. I noticed the patches of dull red rust upon it, and thought of blood.

Such thoughts were natural here, for this was

the inquisition-room of the castle — the torture-chamber.

I became quickly convinced of this as I slipped to the floor, supporting myself with my hand upon my bed.

About the walls were strange mechanisms, unknown to me till then, although some things seemed familiar. I saw a brazier in which still lay a few white ashes. Near this were a number of iron rods of various forms, and several pairs of pincers. There were stout, rusty hooks fast between the stones, and from these hung chains whose coated links told of long disuse.

Opposite to the door was a small square window, guarded by crossed iron bars. This admitted the shaft of gray light I had seen on awaking. It was so high that I could see nothing through it but the sky.

Under the window stood a table, and, between it and the wall, a worm-eaten bench.

My glance returned to the mysterious furniture on which I had slept through the past night.

It looked like a long, narrow table. At the foot a pair of manacles was fixed. At the head two handcuffs were fastened to chains which were coiled upon a sort of windlass. At one end of the windlass

holes were bored, and into one of these a long iron lever was fitted.

I gazed stupidly at this machine, first back and forth, then up and down, before I realized what it was I saw.

Then I shuddered away from it, until my back was against the wall.

It was the rack! The horrible symbol of torment — the very epitome of untold tortures. And on this hideous thing I had slept. On this I had laid me down peacefully, gratefully, the night before! Oh, the omen was a fearful one!

I covered my face with my hands, as, for the first time, the events of yesterday swept through my mind.

Again I saw my lady lying bruised upon the floor, the sun-dial in the castle yard, the green scarf at the tower window, De Pompelac's arrival and just death, the mysterious handkerchief, my lady's departure, my lover's conversion, the castle stairs and my lord's sentence, and lastly a black room and a welcome couch. And that couch — the rack!

God of mercy! What hope remained!

These thoughts were broken by the sound of horse's hoofs. A cavalcade was passing.

I ran across the room and clambered on to the

table beneath the window. Evidently this dungeon was well above ground, for, with my head level with the window I still saw nothing but the sky and the rhythmic swaying of a single bough, slender and green.

I listened attentively. There were two voices, one deep, the other of higher pitch. Both were men's tones. Yet I could have sworn there were three horses. The third rider was evidently of a taciturn bent.

Could this be Bazin returning with the executioner? I had heard that these men spoke but seldom. They say their ears ring constantly with their victim's cries, and their fixed eyes behold always grim sights that freeze their words before they find utterance.

As I leaped to the floor again, my lady's dear face came to me. White and pitiful it was, but with the trusting light I had seen in her eyes when they separated us.

I took it as a sign from heaven.

"Dear lady! Blessed mistress!" I exclaimed, clasping my hands. "You are in prison, too, trusting me, — trusting your faithful servant to keep your secret."

I burst into tears. Self-pity was compounded

with a sweet outgoing of tenderness to my lord's most ill-used wife.

My harrowed mind rested as on a pillow in the thought of my lady's noble sweetness, her charity, her tenderness and purity. I wept long, and it was my salvation.

When I wiped my eyes, sick fancies had left me, and in their place came thoughts, — good, practical thoughts. How to reach my lady's brother with the fatal list still in my bosom; how to avenge her fearful wrongs, how to enlighten my jealous lord, but, above all, how to escape. First and nearest lay the thought of escape.

Oh, how often in that first exaltation of resolve did I pass about that dismal room, feeling the clammy walls, examining every cranny, every stone!

The iron door did not even vibrate to my strongest efforts. Perhaps the weakness of fasting was to blame.

Against the walls at every step I found some new instrument, whose devilish use I might guess but would not dwell upon. Those thoughts meant madness.

I do not know how long I hunted for some object, some clue that a quick mind might turn to use. The window, most obvious resource, was not to be

thought of without a well-tempered tool, and I had only my finger-nails.

The only other possibility of hope lay in the single discovery of a staple and ring fast in one of the ponderous flags of the flooring. At this I tugged again and again, recruiting my breath and strength with prayer after each effort. But even as I worked, I knew my labour to be vain. Undoubtedly this ring was merely some convenience of the torturers.

At length I ceased; my hunt was fruitless.

"I must rest and plan some means of delay," I murmured.

So I sat on the worm-eaten bench behind the table and let my tired mind wander over the daisy fields behind my father's cot. A sweet provision of heaven, was it not, that sent this breath of childhood to me then?

My hungry faintness returned, but worst of all was my thirst. I recalled the brook that flowed in my father's field. I seemed almost to see the lazy white petalled blossoms dipping to ripple the smooth water with coy kisses. I looked about, and the damp stones mocked me. I laid my fevered lips against the wall, but I seemed to kiss a sepulchre, and I shrank away in disgust.

I suffered, but my mind was still clear. I thought now of the fatal list of names in that little box in

my bosom. All my lady's terrible misery and disgrace, all my danger and suffering, had their source there. I felt of the little object in my dress in a sort of wonder, that from so small a thing had grown so great a catastrophe.

Was all this loss, this pain and labour, to be in vain? Could I find no way of bringing this sacred box to the king's messenger, my lady's brother?

I stretched my arms out upon the table and laid my aching head upon them for greater ease. My wits had always served me well. Could they bring me succour now?

My lord De Bersier was to come to the secret passage that very evening at sundown. I had heard him tell my lady this. The hours were slipping away. What could I do?

Then I thought of Albert. Would he be sent with my meal again. If he came, dared I entrust the whole truth to him. Had it been my own secret I would not have hesitated. But my lady trusted me. I was all the hope she had under God. And yet, how else than through him had I left the least chance of success?

I tried to ponder this question well — to weigh all I knew for and against reposing this final trust in the lover to whom I had already told so much. But my poor brain was starved. Like a trembling

horse overloaded on a steep hillside, it willed the best, but could not serve me.

At length I stood up and dropped my arms wearily.

"All is black to me!" I said, inwardly. "God shows me no other path. So be it! When Albert comes I will tell him all, and Heaven grant he be willing to bear my message safely."

By a strange illusion, this decision made me feel that the conditions on which it rested were sure to come to pass. I did not question Albert's coming, or his coming alone. I even crossed to the door of my cage and listened intently for his approach. But there was no sound, nothing.

I held my breath, my whole being in my sense of hearing. Far below me a very faint drip of water was all I heard.

Then, for the first time, I doubted of being fed.

"They will starve me!" I whispered, horror-stricken.

"Better than the torture," something hinted within.

"It *is* the torture," I replied, aloud, with the heat of one contradicted.

I paced up and down, anger rising in my breast.

"Yes, yes!" I muttered, savagely. "Now I see the plan. I have not touched food or water

for more than a day. My lord knows this. He plans to prolong this starvation, — to sap my strength, — and then deliver me to the question."

I stopped in my walk and struck my hands together as all seemed to become clearer to me.

"He deems it a mercy!" I cried. "The weaker I am, the less torment need be applied to reach the truth!"

I laughed wildly, and wrung my hands.

"O God!" I cried, "the truth he will not accept. Nothing avails! I know nothing of this accursed mystery, and he refuses to believe it!"

I gazed desperately about me. Was there no escape, no hope? Could I not — Yes, yes! I could kill myself. I would open a vein.

I forgot God and my religion. Let those blame me who have felt my despair!

I searched everywhere for some edged tool with which to carry out my design. I must have been more than half-crazed, for all calculation left me.

As I look back at what followed, it is as though I gazed into a deep well, with here and there a point picked out for vision by the twilight filtering from above.

I see mad strivings to reach the window bars, — desperate efforts to lift that ring in the floor, — wild prayers to God for vengeance — release and

forgiveness — as my weak mind flared this way and that, like a candle expiring in fitful draughts of air.

All this is not only vague in memory, but disconnected, without sequence or reason. I think it ended in my dashing my head against the wall, for I know I lay a long time unconscious.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE QUESTION

THROUGH a dizzy ringing dance of varying pains I heard a harsh scraping as if a bench or table had been moved on the stone floor. There was a murmur of voices which seemed to come nearer as consciousness returned.

"We'll need a light, man. The day is waning, and you've none too great a window in your parlour!" There was a chuckling laugh, and I heard a weight set upon the floor beside me.

By this time my brain was clear, but I did not open my eyes.

"What's that you have brought with you, Sebastian?" the voice resumed.

I heard no reply, but the same speaker continued:

"Water, eh! D'ye think we'd best begin with that?"

That magic word "water" stirred me to life. I opened my eyes.

I found myself lying on the floor, my face turned toward the table. Upon the small bench facing me there sat a round little man all in black. He was mending a pen, and, by the light of the two candles near him, I saw that he was looking at some one behind me.

I was about to look up when metal touched my lips, and some one raised my head. Then I tasted water, and entered into paradise.

What a wealth of physical joy! I drank and drank, my heart overflowing with the cup, and I lost, for the moment, all memory of pain or loss or fear.

I emptied the great cup — a quart at least, I think, and then leaned back against the wall with my eyes closed. New life ran through me. My thirst assuaged, I thought myself as sound in wits as ever, but my bodily need still held my brain helpless. My nerves were fearfully unstrung.

As I sat limp and weak, huddled up almost as I had fallen in my madness, the little man in black continued speaking:

"No, no! On the whole I advise the rack, Sebastian. The affair seems old in style, but it will serve, methinks. Test the windlass, my man."

I opened my eyes again, and gazed, half-curious, half-frightened, upon a man of great stature, who

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stood at the head of the rack. He was in his shirt, with his sleeves turned up, and, as he swung the iron bar in the windlass, I saw the muscles in his hairy arms swell and fall and then swell again.

This man's head was swathed in many bandages, and over his eyes was the narrow black mask that executioners wear to render them more terrible. Through the two holes I could see his eyes glistening.

I gazed about and saw only these two, — the black dwarf with the pen, and the standing impersonal giant, with his bandaged head and face. Who, then, had given me to drink?

The little man looked toward me and nodded.

"Well, damsel, the draught of water seems to have given you a little life, eh? You must thank Sebastian for that, girl," and he nodded toward the giant. "But, bless you, thank me even more, my lass. Had I not interfered the great lout would have gone right on with quart after quart, until you felt near bursting. Ah, the question by water is fearsome, they say that know best. Sweet at the first cup, then insipid, then terrible."

With the last word he leaned over and shot his chin forward, while his half-open eyes seemed to glare a spoken threat.

I turned to his companion. These two seemed

like dream goblins, and I looked to see them mouth and threaten together, each in his own way. But the executioner simply stood with his bare arms folded, waiting for orders, — motionless.

Presently the clerk sat back, and, straightening a sheet of paper before him, "Witness, stand up," he commanded.

I stood as he bade me.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You begin well, girl. See you continue so. Be a good little child and we won't have to send you to bed."

He grinned, and pointed at the rack.

Then, for the first time, I remembered where I was and what it all meant. Believe me or not, until then I seemed to dream, half in the pain of starvation, half in the blessed enjoyment of that draught of water.

I started forward quickly.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Your inquisitor, mistress," he replied, severely. "I am secretary of the corporation, and I sit here by authority of your lord, the Count Armand du Beaulieu, to put you to the question." He paused, and frowned upon me.

"And who is — is that?" I demanded, pointing at the giant.

"The town executioner, woman. See that you fall not into his hands, for mercy he knows not!"

I knew it — I had known it. And yet it seemed to need the open speaking of the word itself to bring home to me the direful fact. I retreated slowly into a corner, and my tortured spirit rose again to fevered unrest as I faced, horror-struck, that motionless, faceless Thing.

"Now, answer, girl!" The words seemed to come from a distance. "What is your name?"

I made no reply.

Was this query addressed to me? If so, I knew it not. I was thinking of that monster's history. I seemed to see the grisly past that hung about him.

Some one struck upon a table — far away — very far — and then that distant voice, —

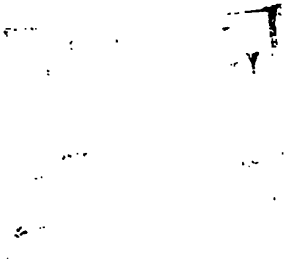
"Will you answer, wench? What is your name?"

The great frame of the executioner seemed to tower to superhuman size. Whispers surrounded me, hinting at what those corded hands and knotted arms had worked on quivering nerves and writhing flesh.

Again that distant voice:

"Soho! Already obstinate! D'ye see that table, woman? There's where you lie for truth!" A chuckling laugh, and then, — "There's where you'll be chained if you answer not, d'ye hear?

"'WILL YOU ANSWER, WENCH? WHAT IS YOUR NAME?'"



Your feet in the foot rings and your wrists in the manacles, and then slow pulling, straining, tearing, as the windlass turns under Sebastian's brawny hand. Knee joints — arms — shoulders — "

Then I turned and faced the glib talker, and he fell suddenly silent and white at what he saw in my face. He stammered and halted.

But I swept my wild gaze from him to his silent mate; something horrible, fatal, overwhelming was boiling upward toward my brain. Then I screamed — shriek upon shriek — and was silent.

Ah, God! The relief! Those cries saved me from a maniac's fate. I remember thinking that if my lord had heard me he would believe my torture had begun — and it had, God knows.

After those shrieks came a cold despair — a dull fury.

I must be tortured. Well, so be it! But first I would fight. Fight like a tigress at bay. All my little remaining strength should be devoted to that end.

"You infamous devils!" I panted. "In your power I am, indeed! You'll tear me — burn — and then kill me — " I crept slowly toward the executioner, and he moved two steps to meet me, as though fascinated.

"Then do it!" I shouted. "Do it — do it — do

it!" and I rushed upon the giant and flung myself upon him, clutching swiftly at his masked eyes.

Like lightning he caught my hands, gripped them both in one of his own great paws, and cast his free arm about my form.

Like a babe he lifted me, and in terror I shrieked again, for now he was pressing me to his loathsome breast. His awful mask — those monstrous bandages were close beside my head, and I heard him whisper:

"*N'aie pas peur, p'tite abeille. Je t'aime.*"

("Fear not, little honey-bee. I love thee.")

It was Albert!

The revulsion was overwhelming. A thousand dazzling points leaped before me. I seemed sinking lower and lower. My senses were leaving me.

But then came the stimulus of joy. It was Albert! My Albert! I was safe!

All fear, all tension, all struggle passed. Peacefully, like a limp, sleeping child, my whole body yielded, and my head fell upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER XV.

AN EXPLANATION

ALBERT held me in his arms for a moment only, and then laid me down upon the rack. Oh, was ever bed of flowers as soft as that engine of torment then?

I turned and hid my face from my lover — weeping, yet smiling — doubting nothing — giving up my whole being to infinite relief and ease.

At first what passed about me gave me slight concern. The little clerk asked some question. There was a stifled exclamation — a slight struggle — and shortly afterward the iron door closed softly.

I leaped to a sitting posture — startled — alarmed.

Was Albert leaving me?

No. There he stood, with his back to the door. The bandages and mask were gone, and he was grinning affably. His hand was extended toward me, and in it — a dish.

I dare not tell with how little dignity I sprang upon that food, and yet, as I took the plate, ere I

begun my repast, I kissed the honest hand that had saved me.

Albert raised to his lips the hand I had kissed, and looked me in the eyes as I retired to a seat upon the bench.

Seating himself, he sighed, and put one arm about me complacently, while I gave him a lesson in the art of finished gluttony. I noticed, too, that he held me rather tightly. Well, he took advantage of my helplessness in this, of course, but could I teach him manners just then?

Nay! I was tasting content. Content so sweet as, God knows, I were a fool to hope for again.

I overlooked the many further obstacles to freedom. All sense of danger was gone. I felt that my sorrows were past. Only a smiling future lay before me. My Albert had found the way thus far, and I nestled against him, feeling that all else was easy.

My tired spirit asked not how and where and when. I lived only for joy; and a brilliant sunshine seemed to envelop us two, sitting there alone in a stone dungeon.

When I had finished my meal I turned to Albert, and, putting both my hands into his free hand, —

"And now tell me!" I said.

He did not tease me with preamble or preface,

but plunged at once into a simple narrative, as if expecting my question.

"Last night, when Bazin left for Thiers, I followed him, *ma mie*. I knew he must first seek Messer Pignon, secretary of the corporation — "

I interrupted him.

"The little man? What have you done with him?"

"Gagged and bound in the hall outside."

"But will he not be seen there?"

"Not for a long time, little one. When we two came up here for this devil's errand, the rest fled to other parts of the castle. They will not return until commanded; you may be sure we run no danger here. My lord has not accustomed us to crushing weak women!" he growled.

"Weak!" I exclaimed, and tried to draw away.

He grinned impudently.

"Well, not as strong as this," he said, contracting the brawny arm that confined me.

"Go on!" I commanded, half-smothered, and wholly pleased.

"Where was I? Oh, yes! Bazin had first to go to Pignon's residence. I sneaked into town behind him and made at once for Sebastian's house — he is the executioner, you know. There I bribed the fellow and his greedy wife. I changed clothes with

him, pretended toothache so as to hide my handsome face in bandages, and when Bazin called with Pignon for Sebastian, I came instead."

I tried to jump in my seat for sheer delight, but it was impossible — my quarters were too narrow.

"Not so bad, eh?" grinned my lover.

"Oh, oh, perfect!" I cried. "I'll never call you a fool again. Go on!"

"Well, they brought us here, Pignon and me, and hid us from the castle folk in the stable, as only those who were sworn to secrecy were to know what was happening. I slept well most of the day, and then, after I had secretly opened the exit gate of the moat, I was brought here."

"Opened the exit gate!" I cried.

"Yes, to empty the moat. It wants cleaning badly," he said, with a sly look that betrayed him.

"Now stop teasing, Albert. Tell me the truth. Why did you empty the moat?"

He merely smiled in an exasperating way, and replied:

"You'll see!"

I wrenched my hands loose, and boxed both his ears.

Then I stood up.

He simply sat still and grinned more happily

than ever. Somehow punishment from me always seems to affect him in this way.

I leaned back against the table, my hands behind me. Then, tipping my head, I said, patronizingly:

"Fairly well, my friend, as far as you've gone. But what next?"

Albert rose, and walked around the table.

"First I'll snuff the candles," he replied. "It's almost night outside, and our wicks are overlong."

I started, thinking of M. de Bersier. This was Tuesday night. He was due at the secret entrance to the tower.

Albert was bending over the candles, and I turned away to feel in my dress for the little box.

I sighed in relief. It was safe.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OUBLIETTE

ALBERT had completed his task, and was half-sitting upon the edge of the table.

"So you don't trust me for the rest?" he asked, seriously.

I turned upon him swiftly.

"You great goose!" I exclaimed, half-provoked.

His face cleared, and I crept slowly nearer to him until one of my hands was a prisoner again.

"Then I'll tell you more, little one. Yesterday, while you were in your chamber, we men buried De Pompelac and divided his belongings among us. All but the great emerald ring on his finger, and, as this could not be fairly divided, we cast dice for it. Look!"

He plunged his hand into his pocket and produced the ring. I took it in silence. The band was of massive gold. The stone was an emerald that seemed to me of extraordinary size.

"It has a history, that stone," Albert continued. "It is one of twins. The baron's brother, Louis Delmar, wears its mate on a setting just like that. How they got it is not precisely known, but there is a legend connected with the stone, I'm told."

"A legend?"

"Yes. Bazin had it from De Pompelac's steward. The story goes that if two brothers wear the twin emeralds, either will know when ill befalls the other. Those may believe such tales who will. As for me, I thank God for the luck in my dice that gave me the ring, for now you are safe from want."

I looked up from the ring inquiringly.

"Yes. Now listen. We are going to leave here, you and I, at once—"

"What!" I cried, "through the castle?"

"Tut, tut! Hear me out, little one. We leave here at once, I say. You must go your way—No, don't say where, and I must follow our master to the war."

"Oh!" I cried, and came nearer to him. At that he captured both my hands.

"Our master follows Monseigneur de Bourbon," Albert went on. "We start to-morrow, or the day after. That is why he was pushing things so hard with you. Time was short!"

"Then we must part?" I asked, in a low voice.

"For awhile, *ma mie*. Does that sadden you?"

For sole answer I buried my face in his breast, and wept.

He stroked my head and went on:

"Never fear, honey-bee; I'll return safe and sound enough. There is justice to be done to my lady, God bless her! The saints have brought us thus far through some peril, and I believe you and I are to be spared for the rest. Now I leave the emerald with you for capital. It is all I have left. You are to stay here and keep watch over my lady. You may need money. When you do, take that stone to a Jew, and you can obtain all you need."

I stepped back, wiping my eyes.

"But — but my — my friend," I sobbed, "you, too, — you — you will need — need money."

"Not a maravedi!" he exclaimed, stoutly. "No, take the ring and guard it safely. And — there's another thing, my friend. You and I may have to get news to each other. I want you to learn to write. Go to the curé; he will teach you."

I smiled at this.

"And you —"

"I'm to learn from my lord's leech. He has already offered to instruct me if I will give him fencing lessons. What would you say to a scholar for a husband?"

At this I fairly laughed.

"I'd say that I preferred my Albert, and he will never be a scholar."

I took one of his great brown hands and stretched the fingers open.

"Look here! A pen would be lost in that unwieldy paw —"

He shook himself clear with a laugh, and strode to the windlass at the head of the rack.

"Here's my pen for the nonce, lass," he said, and, drawing the heavy iron lever from its socket, he swung it around his head. I ducked low with a gasp.

"Now we'll leave here, little one."

Passing the end of his bar through that ring in the floor with which I had struggled so in vain, he bore upward with all his splendid strength. My eyes rested now with pleasure on the great ridges of muscles of his forearm that so short a time before had been my terror. I even blamed myself for imagining that dear arm an instrument of cold cruelty.

Answering his mighty heave, one of the flags in the floor tilted slowly, disclosing what seemed a stairway leading straight down into a dark void.

At last the stone fell back, and Albert drew his hand across his damp brow.

"That was a pull!" he admitted.

I approached the stairs and looked down. I could not see whither they led.

"Wait," said Albert.

Going to the table, he brought one of the candles and held it down near the opening.

"See!" he exclaimed.

I started back with a gasp of dismay. There were three steps — and then — nothing — empty, black space.

"Saints above!" I whispered, "what is that?"

"The oubliette!"

With a shudder, I remembered what I had heard of these horrible traps. If the lord of the castle wished a prisoner forgotten (*oublié*), he invited him to descend this stairway. The light properly held concealed the snare. The unsuspecting prisoner descended three steps, trusted himself on a supposed fourth, and his despairing cry marked his oblivion.

"Where does it go?" I asked, approaching the edge again and looking down.

"A steep, sloping slide throws a falling body into the moat," he replied.

A light burst upon me.

"And that is why you drew off the water to-day," I cried.

He nodded, smiling.

"Decidedly!" I said, teasingly, "your association with me has given you wit, my friend. You have shown great intelligence. You have done well — very well."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ESCAPE

ALBERT shrugged his shoulders good naturedly, as I finished my patronizing speech, and turned in silence to the bucket of water, from which he drew a long rope which had been coiled skilfully upon the bottom of the pail.

"The hangman's rope," he declared, simply. "I borrowed it at Thiers."

Without further delay, he passed the rope several times around my waist, and placed the short end in my hand.

"Hold that in one hand, *ma mie,* and the body of the rope with the other."

I did as he directed, and he let me down slowly into the oubliette foot by foot.

I slid down an inclined plane of damp flagging, and at length found myself at a circular opening near the bottom of the moat, well below the usual water-line. Now, however, the ditch was dry, save

for a trickle of clear water reflecting the sky amid the leaves and slime of the bottom.

I stood upon the edge of the aperture and unwound the rope. Then I gave it a little pull, and it was rapidly drawn up.

"Stand aside, lass!" came a call from above.

"All right!" I replied, and slipped out on to a narrow coping beside the opening.

I heard the stone trap-door fall with a dull crash. There was a swift whirr in the passage, and Albert shot out upon the soft bottom of the moat unharmed.

He came toward me, laughing gently.

"I used to do that in my play when I was a boy," he said. "The oubliette stood open then, and every time the moat was emptied for a clearing-out two or three of us used to coast down that slide. Saints! how my mother used to lay on when I came home all slime and rags!"

We laughed, standing there together hand in hand. And then we thought how we stood on the brink of long parting, and fell silent, looking wistfully into each other's saddened faces.

Of a sudden Albert stooped, raised me in his arms, and started to carry me across the moat. He sank nearly to his knees at each step, but we were safe, for beneath the plants the bed of the ditch was rock.

Climbing the outer side, which was not very steep, my soldier set me down on the sward.

I was free! Hope and life lay before us!

"Now we must each go our own way, little one," he said, slowly. "Keep the emerald — hide securely — watch my lady — and trust the saints. Ah, yes! Wait!"

He unfastened the heavy dagger and sheath that hung at his belt.

"Take this, too. Who knows how soon you may need arms? Fight, my lass, — fight for our lady and ourselves."

Then he fell on one knee, so that our faces were nearly level, and, drawing me to him, spent on my tear-stained cheeks a score of kisses. Nor did I keep them all, — perhaps, even, I gave more than I received. But, ah, my heavy heart!

He released me, sprang to his feet, and, waving his hand, ran off toward the drawbridge.

"Farewell, little honey-bee!" he cried. "Remember the writing. Remember your Albert."

Those were his last words.

I stood quite still, — how long I do not know. I am sure I had long loved Albert, but his embrace, his kisses, had seemed to open new stores of affection. It was not that he had saved me from the torture. As I live, it was not. I gave that never

a thought. No, no; it was the pressure of those splendid arms, — that and his kisses, warm yet timid, too. It was these, known for the first time, — it was these that made parting a thousand times harder than I had thought it could be.

Do you wonder that I had never before known those delights? Ah, remember, women of low station have need to be careful with their lovers.

And so I pondered in delighted yet sad contemplation of this new depth of tenderness. I drank of its consolation. When should we meet again? After what trials? Through what changes?

The very thought of change in him seemed to stop the course of my blood. I pressed one hand to my heart, and felt a small, hard object in my bosom. That touch changed the current of my thoughts.

I threw my head back with a sudden resolve. A sacred task was to be accomplished. Let my selfish thoughts and dreams await future leisure.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BESIDE THE MOAT

LOOKING about me, I could vaguely discern the black mass of the drawbridge on my right. To my left, the rising moon showed where the moat and its bordering path turned the corner of the castle. That way lay the outer end of the passage to the eastern tower. There it was that I was to meet my lady's brother.

I slowly followed the path, bordered on the left by a line of poplars and flanked upon the right by the moat and castle wall. As I walked, I became conscious of the two objects still clasped in my hands — the ring and the sheathed dagger.

I tucked the ring into a tiny pocket within my girdle. The dagger I raised to my lips and smiled as I kissed the rough leather.

"Dear Albert!" I murmured. "How can I use a weapon whose very handle I can scarce grasp! Alas! Like the timid hare — I must run from danger — not meet it."

As I came opposite the stables which lay within the moat, I looked about me with the utmost precaution, standing concealed by a black tree shadow.

I saw nothing — heard no one — and so ventured to run quickly across the moonlit patch of sward between myself and the shaded grotto.

This grotto was a half-dismantled edifice erected by some former lord of Beaulieu, as a mere ornament, to all appearances, but really to mask the opening of the secret passage.

Leading from the eastern tower chamber to this point beyond the moat, the passage had doubtless been most useful in times of siege.

Here it was that my Lord de Bersier was to come that night.

I tiptoed to the entrance and listened attentively. I heard nothing. Then I whispered:

"Monsieur le Vicomte —"

There was no reply.

Evidently I was the first at the rendezvous.

I slipped into the shadow of the grotto and waited, standing close beside the pile of stones on the side facing the stables.

As I looked into the moat, I thought that the little stream at the bottom was wider and deeper than when I had crossed it.

For several minutes I watched, comparing the

edge of the rill with successive glistening patches where the moon picked out the more prominent of the wet leaves and stones.

Yes — there was no doubt of it. The moat was filling up. Albert had closed the gates, and soon the orifice of the oubliette would be closed and the last trace of our means of escape would have disappeared.

As I raised my eyes at length from this long scrutiny of the water, I was startled to find that I was not alone.

A solitary figure stood on the outer edge of the moat, apparently gazing into it as I had been doing. The moon, whose light was increasing every moment, shone full upon this strange figure.

I saw at a glance that it was a man of gentle birth — a cavalier in riding costume. As I looked about in alarm, I saw that his horse stood somewhat farther back, half in the shadow of the poplars, evidently tethered.

My gaze returned to the cavalier, and at that moment he turned and raised his face to the stars so that I could plainly discern his features in the moonlight.

The face looked familiar, although I felt sure I had never seen this gentleman before. As he moved slowly away from the moat, I noticed that he wore

no sword. His only weapon seemed to be a dagger at his belt.

He stopped suddenly, as though at sight of some new object. My eyes followed his and I nearly betrayed myself by an exclamation of fear.

A man in peasant's dress was approaching the grotto with rapid steps. I knew him for my lady's brother in spite of his costume, and my heart stood still as I faced this new complication.

The silence was roughly broken by the gentleman whom I had first seen:

"Hello, fellow!" he called, in a subdued voice.

The supposed peasant stopped suddenly, and, drawing his cap farther over his eyes, turned toward the speaker in silence.

"I have been looking for some one who could answer questions," the cavalier continued, advancing toward M. de Bersier.

There was only a muttered sentence in reply.

The stranger laughed.

"So!" he exclaimed, "your voice is a little out of order, my fine fellow. The complaint is a familiar one. But I have the remedy."

He drew a coin from his belt and offered it to the seeming peasant.

After a moment's hesitation, an unwilling palm was extended, and the coin dropped into it. I saw

the young vicomte's head turn slowly, as though he sought some means of escape.

"Now that I have cured your little vocal trouble, my man, you will answer a question or two. Do you know the Baron de Pompelac?"

I started violently, and the vicomte stepped back a pace, evidently as startled as I.

"What is the matter?" asked the stranger, quickly. "You are startled? Then you know something. You have seen the baron, — perhaps know where he is! Speak, fellow, speak quickly!" and he put his hand roughly upon the vicomte's shoulder.

The young noble drew himself up and shook off the offending hand. Then, with an evident attempt to hide his resentment, he said, in a rough voice:

"I have no knowledge whatever of the baron's movements, monsieur."

The cavalier found it his turn to step back in amazement.

Alas! even the assumed tones betrayed a gentleman. But the language! The pure French! The choice of words!

One sentence had betrayed him.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN OPPORTUNE BLOW

"What is this!" exclaimed the stranger, after a pause. "'I have no knowledge,' forsooth. Do the peasants of the Bourbonnais frequent Parisian drawing-rooms?"

Then, with a change of tone:

"Monsieur, your disguise is useless. In times like these I cannot remain blind to such an incident. I demand your name, monsieur."

"And by what right?" was the haughty reply.

"As a peasant, you should answer because you are commanded. Seeming a peasant and being something more, you are presumably a spy. Is my reasoning clear, monsieur?"

"My God! My God!" I murmured. "After all, must he be captured? Is my lady's sacrifice in vain?"

M. de Bersier advanced a step toward his adversary.

"Your logic is admirable, Monsieur Louis Delmar," he said.

Delmar! De Pompelac's brother!

No less astonished than I, the cavalier leaned over, seeking to distinguish the features of the man who had recognized him.

"You know me!" he exclaimed. Then, with his hand on his dagger: "You are either an enemy or a friend, monsieur. Declare yourself."

"I am not your friend, monsieur. You best know whether or not you are my enemy," and, removing his hat, the vicomte turned so that the moonlight fell full upon his face.

"Henri de Bersier!"

"At your service, monsieur."

"De Bersier! Just Heaven! At last — at last I hold you in my hands."

His laugh froze my blood. Oh! why had I not brought Albert — told him all, and made him my ally!

M. de Bersier stood still, apparently unmoved by his enemy's triumph.

"How often have I longed to meet you! Longed to repay in person the heavy debt you have imposed upon our house! And now! Now I find you a king's spy in a Bourbon camp. A single cry from

you or me will bring a score of trusty fellows from the castle — "

He paused and struck his hands together in a transport of glee.

" Saints above us! " he cried, " it is your own sister's husband who will judge you. He dare not spare you. You will hang! D'ye hear, you dog! Hang before your sister's face! "

With a sudden snarl of rage, De Bersier sprang upon his enemy.

" Coward! " he exclaimed.

He clasped Delmar's throat with both his hands. The two swayed back and forth upon the grass, while I stood helpless, fascinated.

I saw Delmar reaching for his dagger, and cried out in spite of myself; but I think neither heard me.

The vicomte saw his adversary's movement, and grasped the groping hand in one of his. This partly released the pressure on his enemy's throat.

With his free hand, Delmar wrenched away the choking grip, and, panting wildly for breath, glared in hate upon his foe.

For a moment the two stood thus, facing each other, each grasping one hand of the other. Then Delmar caught his breath:

"Help, ho! Help! A spy!" he shouted. "Beaulieu to the rescue!"

The vicomte uttered an exclamation of alarm, and dashed his closed fist into his adversary's face.

In an instant the two had joined in a deadly embrace. Delmar stepped back. His foot caught, and the two fell prone upon the grass.

Over and over they twisted and rolled, now one having the upper hand, now the other, while at intervals that coward cry arose from Delmar's lips:

"Help! Beaulieu to the rescue! A spy! A spy!"

The sudden battle seemed to have stunned me. I stepped forward from hiding, spellbound with eager interest in what I saw.

Could these be noblemen?

Thus had I seen my brothers wrestle and fight, screaming in their rustic rage. But gentlemen! Men of courtesy and dignity — men wont to settle their difference in chivalrous debate under the strict code of the duello!

It all seemed untrue — impossible — unreal. I was learning for the first time how gentility sloughs off when the eye of the world is removed. Alone — all but unarmed — these two nobles fell to the level of drunken peasants. So it seemed to me.

This could not long continue. The castle was

finally aroused. I saw lights moving in the court-yard. In a few moments the men-at-arms would cross the drawbridge and rush to the scene of the struggle.

The spell was broken by this sudden danger, so near, so real, so irresistible.

Albert's dagger was in my hand. I sought to unsheathe it, but it was secured by a spring. I was still too weak, and my nervous fingers would not bend it.

Then I saw that one of the two men was lying helpless. It was Monsieur de Bersier. Delmar crouched over him, panting fiercely.

I rushed toward them as I saw the coward's dagger leave its sheath, glittering in the moonlight.

Just then I saw torches turning the corner of the castle.

I leaped toward the struggling pair, frantic with a double fear.

Too late, my God! The blow fell!

But no! The vicomte had twisted swiftly and suddenly as his enemy's hand descended. The dagger struck the earth.

In an instant it was raised again.

"Damn you!" Delmar began.

But he never finished his sentence. Raising my weapon, I dashed the hilt against his temple with

all my remaining strength, and he fell limply upon his side.

Amid all my excitement, I noticed upon his hand the double of the emerald ring in my girdle.

From the swaying torches fast approaching came the men's voices calling.

Monsieur de Bersier rose slowly, confused, half-exhausted.

"Quick!" I whispered, urging him away from the moat. "I am Gilberte. Take this. It is the list of names."

As we hurried toward the shadowing trees, I pressed the little box into his palm. He took it mechanically, half-dazed by my sudden appearance.

"Here!" I exclaimed. "Here is Delmar's horse. Quick! Mount and away!"

As he obeyed, unquestioning, I untied the halter, turned the horse toward the road, and struck him with the rope's end.

Horse and rider leaped into the darkness.

I turned for a last look at the moonlit castle. A dozen torches were grouped about the prostrate body on the grass.

Then, lifting my petticoats, I darted into the thicket as a quail seeks cover from the hunters.

CHAPTER XX.

AN APPEAL AND A DEPARTURE

It is necessary to leave Gilberte's narrative at this point and to return to the castle.

The sun was setting that Tuesday evening when the Count du Beaulieu gave orders that the inquisition of Gilberte should begin.

He did not himself see Pignon and his companion, but directed that they should be led to the prisoner. He had written the questions to be asked of her, and he counted upon receiving an early report.

Du Beaulieu was entirely within his right. Within his domain his rule was absolute. He was empowered to administer the higher and the lower justice. The power of life and death was his.

Not only was this his legal right, but, situated as he was, he could not but be sustained by his sense of moral necessity. Believing his lady guilty of the most atrocious offence within her power,

believing her maid to have contributed to this guilt, and to know who had been a partner in it, the lord of Beaulieu recognized no alternative to the course he had pursued.

Gilberte was a menial and the daughter of a peasant, although not a serf. Despite a theoretical liberty of a limited kind, she was practically almost totally subject to his will. Her refusal to obey his command and reveal what she knew of her mistress's supposed lover was no less than petit treason. The penalty was torture until she confessed, and death afterward. No dissent from such a proposition was conceivable in the feudal France of 1523.

The count was naturally a just man and a kind master. He was beloved by all his feudatories, and many an instance of generous aid and even of personal attention and sympathy might they have adduced as reasons for their love.

Even Gilberte, the immediate sufferer from his course of action, did not dream of condemning him, save for his readiness to believe his wife guilty. Assuming this belief justified, neither she nor any other in those times would have thought his course unjust.

Nor was it extraordinary that the count had been convinced by the apparently strong evidence of his lady's guilt. Whoever has read the authentic chron-

icles of those days, and has studied even a little what filled the place of evidence in the sixteenth century, will understand that, after all, no other conclusion could have been expected under the circumstances.

Du Beaulieu was not cruel in cold blood. The thought of what was about to take place in Gilberte's dungeon was unbearable to him. It was, therefore, in the effort to distract his mind that he proceeded to his armory to superintend the operations actively going forward there.

The armourer — a red-haired Norman, Bertrand Desnoix by name — was moving among his three assistants, with here an encouraging word, there an order, and always a vigour, ardour, and energy that made industry contagious.

The four men stood up and removed their caps on seeing the count enter. He returned a friendly gesture to their salute, and bade them not interrupt their labours. Then going to Bertrand's side, —

"Have you completed the inspection of my own helmets?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord," said the armourer, briskly, leading the way to a chest near at hand. "Will it please your lordship to examine them? Here is the battle helmet. I have reinforced the back with

this steel band and have altered the shape of the neck opening somewhat. The rivets have been tightened, and I feel sure the visor will not fall accidentally again. Will your lordship deign to notice the gorget? The entire fabric is composed of very small links, and there are two layers."

The count took the helmet in his gloved hands, and, as he examined it critically, Bertrand rubbed it here and there with a bit of soft leather, jealous of the faint marks his own fingers had left upon the mirror-like steel.

"I can find no fault in it, Bertrand," said his master at length. "Have you been as thorough with the parade helmet? Let us see."

With pleased alacrity, the armourer replaced the battle helmet, and drew the second head-piece from the chest.

At this moment, the door opened, and the count turned to face the newcomer inquiringly.

"May I come in?"

The speaker was clad in the white frock of a Franciscan monk. The cowl hung on his shoulders, revealing a shaven crown surrounded by a ring of pure white hair. His features were coarse, but the fearless blue eyes, open yet serious, and the sweet expression of the large mouth imparted that moral attraction to the whole face that makes us

forget to think of the mere beauty of structural lines.

At sight of the priest, Du Beaulieu moved forward two or three steps.

"You are welcome, father," he said. "We are busy, you see, for to-morrow we take our departure."

The count's chaplain, for he it was, advanced slowly and looked in hesitation at the four workmen.

"I wish to see you alone, my son," he said.

With a slight frown, Du Beaulieu looked sharply at the priest, who returned his gaze quietly and without any change of expression. Then, with a sign, the count dismissed his men, who left the room at once.

The nobleman seated himself and indicated a bench to his visitor.

"Pray be seated, Father Paul," he said, a little stiffly. "I am always glad to hear you."

The Franciscan shook his head slightly, and, standing before the count, folded his hands before him.

"My son," he said, in the same even tone he had first employed, "where is your wife?"

The count's hand gripped the arm of his chair

and his whole body seemed to stiffen. But he merely replied, with seeming calm:

"In the Convent of St. Cecilia."

"A prisoner?"

"At my pleasure, yes."

A change in the position of the hands alone betrayed Father Paul's increase of feeling.

"Have you acted in cold blood?" he asked, mildly. "Have you fully considered your responsibility before Heaven?"

"I have. God approves of my will. I know it."

The monk's hands parted in a gesture of bewildered inquiry.

"But, why? How can it be that I return from a three-days' absence to find my lady gone — and in a prison?"

Du Beaulieu braced himself against the back of his chair and looked up under his brows.

"Do you wish to know? Can you bear it?"

A gnawing anger surged within him. The pale, serene face seemed to mock the agony in his breast.

"My son, I must know. Before my Maker I am responsible for the souls in my charge. Again I ask you, Why have you imprisoned your wife?"

The count leaned forward suddenly:

"Because she is an adulteress!" he cried, his eyes flashing.

The monk's hands closed with an iron grip. He fell back a step, and his eyes grew larger and brighter in his fast paling face.

Twice, thrice, he opened his mouth to speak, but choked back the hot words, while his lips moved in prayer.

At length he covered his face with both hands and waited, quivering, — waited for self-control. The count did not move, but watched the priest with unchanged face.

After a long pause, Father Paul uncovered his face.

He was very white. His lips were compressed in a thin line, and all his features were rigid with emotion. He gazed with mingled sternness and reproach into his companion's excited eyes.

"It is false!" he exclaimed at last. "It is the vile calumny of Satan."

The count rose menacingly to his feet, but the low vibrant voice proceeded evenly:

"You are deceived, horribly deceived."

Du Beaulieu smiled scornfully and turned away with an impatient gesture.

The priest followed him with his eyes and continued, solemnly:

"As I know my own soul, so do I know that

of the gracious and noble lady, Yvonne du Beaulieu!"

"Stop there!" cried the count, turning swiftly upon his companion. "Never pronounce that name again in my presence, — never even behind my back. That name no living woman bears. One has borne it, because I believed her pure, but she is dead. The convent is her tomb, — the antechamber to the sepulchre!"

The chaplain had not moved. Only his eyes, narrowed now by a frown, were turned toward the count.

"Weak human soul!" he said. "Presumption of a wayward heart that dares foretell the future!"

Du Beaulieu laughed.

"Foretell!" he exclaimed. "Why, I but announce my will. I am her judge before God and man, and I say to you she shall die. She shall die with her lover!"

"Oh, stop, stop, stop, man!" the priest broke in, raising his hand and advancing upon the count. "Curb thy tongue, lest it incur so deep a penalty for thee as shall blast thy soul!"

He paused, and then, with less excitement, returned to the more formal manner of speech.

"I am an old man, my son. Your wife's mother was my penitent when yet a girl. I christened her

daughter — her little Yvonne. All her sweet, loving life have I been her teacher, her confessor."

He smiled sorrowfully, with a gesture of appeal.

"Why, my son, consider! That woman's soul is a crystal uncovered before my eyes. I know her every heart-beat, her every aspiration. To me — Why, listen!" he exclaimed, his voice rising. "Before the face of God and His Son, I pledge my soul for hers! If she has done this thing, may — "

With a cry of horror, the count leaped forward and put his hand upon the priest's mouth.

"Hold! Hold!" he cried. "Do not damn your innocent soul before God! Listen to me!"

He forced the old priest back into the armchair and stood before him quivering.

"You have spoken of your love," he continued. "Yes! You have been her teacher, her confessor, her father. But I! — I have been her husband. Her husband! — do you hear? Flesh of her flesh! Bone of her bone! One with her in body and mind and thought, day and night — always — always! Did I love her, think you? I, too, — I would have damned my soul for her. But she has dishonoured, tricked, befooled me! Soiled my life and my name! Ah, do not speak! Hear me out!

"So you think I have no proof? Yesterday morning I rose early. Upon my table I found

a paper, warning me in plain, brutal, naked words that she entertained a lover in the eastern tower room, — her private room. I taxed her with the crime — showed her the note. She blenched and stammered, quailed beneath my eye, dared not deny her guilt! Without looking at the paper, she knew its purport. Upon her finger I surprised a gold ring, — the love pledge she had forgotten to hide. Oh, then — then I knew the truth!

"Nay, nay, let me finish! I resolved to set a trap for her lover, foreseeing she would try to warn him. And, in sooth, I was right, for her maid was soon passing from door to door, hoping to escape and reach the villain. Thwarted in this, she hastened back to her mistress, and, with a scarf, made a signal at the tower window, evidently a warning prearranged.

"By a strange fate, the Baron de Pompelac called upon the doomed woman, and I took him for the lover. When I appeared, the maid sought to smuggle him out through the secret entrance in the chimney. But I had foreseen this, and posted Bazin in the passage. By my order he slew the baron. Yes, cross yourself, father! But it is her work. That innocent blood cries out against her. They knew of the secret passage, those two women, and I was supposed to be ignorant. Through that pas-

sage the guilty man was wont to enter my house! Oh, you shake your head! Not yet convinced! Then see this!"

The excited man drew from his belt the handkerchief which Bazin had found, and threw it into the chaplain's lap.

"This handkerchief with an embroidered crest was found near the outer end of the secret passage. Found at that fatal hour, with the fop's scent fresh upon it! Gaze upon that, touch it, and then — then, if you dare — offer your soul for hers!"

He ceased speaking and paced the floor with rapid strides, a prey to a storm of passion.

The old priest picked up the handkerchief, unfolded it, and carefully examined the crest embroidered upon it.

"Whose crest is this? — this winged helmet?" he asked at length.

"Do I know?" exclaimed the count. "Ah, if I did, or, rather, when I do — "

He stopped short, listening.

The monk started to his feet.

From some distant point in the castle — piercing walls and doors of stone and iron — faintly there came shriek upon shriek of agony.

Then all was still.

The count closed his eyes and passed his hand across his brow.

"What was that?" asked the priest, shuddering.

"That is the maid, Gilberte," was the cold reply.

"You have dared — "

"Dared!" the count broke in. "For whom do you take me? She knows whose crest that is you have there, and on the rack she shall make full confession. Then she shall hang."

His excitement rose again:

"And then I will bring him here — to the tower chamber — bring him and her. Show them to each other, and wipe out the stain upon my name with their blood!"

No longer with stern eyes, only in sadness the priest gazed upon the furious husband.

"Man's justice!" he murmured.

In silence he stood and waited until the waves of passion should with time abate.

After many minutes the count ceased striding up and down, and stood gazing fixedly before him with frowning brow and clenched teeth. Then his features slowly relaxed, and at last he flung himself into his chair again, and, leaning back with a sigh, closed his eyes.

The pitying gaze of the older man rested long upon that strong face lined with sleepless sorrow.

At last he seated himself upon the bench facing his companion, and began to speak softly again.

"My dear son, I understand now. May God forgive me if I was too prompt to blame you! Terrible indeed is the cross you have been called upon to bear. You have my prayers, — you and your dear lady! Nay, nay! It is my turn now. It is yours to hear me out.

"Listen, my son! You are not alone in this great drama. No man is alone in this world. You are her husband — yes. But I — I am her more than father. Have I, too, not a right to test her and judge her? In my hands God placed her soul unstained, and of me he will require that soul on the judgment-day — still unstained. Oh, my son, my son! That I could but open my heart that you could see it! Oh, that you could know as I know! That you could feel — if only for an instant — the perfect conviction I feel of that pure being's innocence. Alas! what are these petty circumstances — what is this puerile train set in motion by some venomous traducer (whom God punish) — what are these straws of human evidence opposed to the glorious fabric of my perfect insight!

"My son, I made that soul! God used these hands to fashion the pure elements of babyhood in her. Does the statue deceive the sculptor? Into

my ears — purified by the chrism of the Church — her baby voice lisped her first confessions, — her little tale of infant peccadilloes. As she grew older, my lips brought God's teaching to her, and his gospel. I have held on its way to God her every act of repentance. I have known her every step in the path of life. Into my eyes hers have gazed, as I searched her inmost soul week by week, year after year. Man, man! do you know what that means?"

He rose to his feet with a smile of indulgent pity.

"Think you that she whom I have thus formed could deceive me?"

The count made a movement as if to speak.

"Oh, hear me to the end! I speak for your good, — the saints are my witnesses. Stricken husband, I can save you! I hold a human soul naked in my hands. Shall I show it to you thus? Will you look with your own eyes, — see and hear, — and then bow to what God makes clear?"

"What do you mean?"

"Bring your wife here. Let her kneel at my feet, my eyes sounding hers. You shall be concealed near at hand. She must not see you. She must only see God — as she has always seen him

— behind my face. Will you do this, and hear her answers to my frank questions?"

Fascinated by the immense confidence that shone in his confessor's face, the count had risen to his feet.

He was puzzled, irresolute.

Here was a strange demand, an unwonted test. What had seemed to him so plain before, now donned a veil of doubt. Hesitating, he let his eyes wander to and fro, lowering them, half in shame.

Suddenly he straightened himself and faced his companion haughtily once more.

"You speak of the evidence of my senses!" he cried. "Look there!"

He pointed at the handkerchief which had fallen to the floor.

"I have seen and touched that. Aye, smelt it! Faugh! I have seen and touched the ring upon her finger. These are evidences to my senses. I stand on these before God and his saints. You request a further trial? My answer is — no! Next time I see that woman, I will kill her!"

The old priest's strength was exhausted. The violence of this last threat seemed to put an end to his patience.

He drew his cowl over his face.

"Farewell, my son," he said. "On your own

head be your blind sin. My mission in this house is ended."

Motionless and in silence the nobleman accepted his chaplain's decision.

The old priest turned as he left the room.

"The saints enlighten you!" he said.

The house of Du Beaulieu was without a chaplain.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BLACK FROCK

THE highroad between Thiers and Lyons passed within a hundred yards of the castle of Beaulieu.

The village of Beaulieu was a cluster of houses surrounding a small church which stood on the main road facing the broad driveway leading up to the castle.

A half-mile beyond this village, and toward the city of Lyons, a road led southward past Pompelac to the cathedral town of Parsy, while a second branch of the road, diverging from a point a little farther east, led northeastward to the convent of St. Cecilia, and, through the dark hill-pass of Meroix to the Saone.

Toward the point where the Pompelac road joined that to Lyons, two hooded figures were converging.

Although the evening light was fast waning, it might have been seen that he who came from Beau-

lieu was frocked in white, while the other, who approached from the direction of Pompelac, wore the sombre robes of the Dominican order.

The former was Father Paul, the late chaplain of Beaulieu. The other was Father Vincent, a monk also in full priestly orders.

The two men crossed each other where the roads met, each buried in his own thoughts, each taking the road the other had left behind him.

These monks were a parable, — the departing robes of white, the approaching frock of dusty black. They were the past days and the future of the Count Armand du Beaulieu.

Nor is this a mere figure of speech. These men shaped the fate of their master before and after that night.

We have seen under what circumstances Father Paul had resigned his post. Wrapped in a grief not his alone, — not of his own making, —he moved onward, scarce caring whither, slowly, without spirit.

The Dominican, equally absorbed in thought, pressed forward eagerly, restlessly, spurning the wayside dust with his sandalled feet, and giving vent in muttered words to the emotions seething within him.

So passes a bright day of peaceful joys, leaving

regret behind; and even so a stormy night sweeps upon us, restless, menacing in undertones of distant thunder.

At the little church the Dominican paused, looking about him as though to make sure of his position. Then he turned northward and passed silently up the roadway leading to the castle of Beaulieu.

The eastern horizon was silvering with the radiance that precedes the full moon when the monk reached the clearing before the drawbridge. Here he stopped and gazed at the huge dark mass before him, seeming to listen.

At length he advanced to the bridge, but stopped when half-way across it and looked over the side into the moat.

"Strange!" he muttered, after a few moments of contemplation. "The moat is empty. They are not cleaning it at this hour, surely."

Under the cowl, the monk's eyes moved hither and thither, seeking for some clue to explain this phenomenon.

Suddenly a dull crash came to his ears, as from a great distance. Then a swift shadow seemed to be thrown out from the castle wall into the moat.

The shadow was a man's figure, for it stood erect and returned toward the castle, where it was quickly merged in the deeper shadows of the mighty wall.

More timid than curious, apparently, the Dominican passed on until he stood within the vast portico of the castle gate. Here he paused, listening.

Out of the night faint voices were borne to his ears.

He dropped his cowl the better to hear, and stood listening for some time.

Soon he noticed that his own shadow was thrown upon the bridge. The light from within the castle was reflected dully from the vaults of the great hall, passing through an opening above the doorway.

Stepping backward out of the light, the monk let this faint gleam fall unimpeded across the driveway and moat, and at that moment a tall, soldierly man, dressed in dark homespun, his head and arms bare, sprang on to the bridge into the dull radiance, seeming to make for the door.

The monk shrank back into the shadow, flattening himself against the wall. For a moment the newcomer's features were fully revealed to the monk in hiding. Then, as the moat was crossed, the stranger turned to the right and had soon disappeared behind the corner of the building.

The monk came forward cautiously, listening attentively. No sound came to him save a faint rustling in the leaves, as the lazy night breeze whis-

pered a greeting to the rising moon. The voices he had heard were still.

After a moment's pause, he turned and knocked. Almost immediately the bolts were drawn and the door was opened wide. Two house servants stood in the light of a number of torches fixed in the walls.

Seeing the monk, these men bowed their heads and bent one knee in deference.

The monk raised one hand and muttered a blessing. Then he advanced quietly, blinking his eyes in the sudden light.

"My children," he asked, "is my lord the count at home?"

"I believe so," the porter replied. "If the brother will be seated —"

He hurried away, while the monk sank wearily upon a bench and fell to meditation. How long he had waited he could not have told, when at length he was roused by the voice of the count, who spoke from the first landing of the great staircase.

"I am here, brother. What is your wish?"

The Dominican raised his shaven head and faced the count. Each of these men eyed the other curiously.

The monk was of a type very different from that of Father Paul. Tall and angular in figure, with

thin swarthy features and bright liquid eyes, black and restless. The tonsure of coarse black hair surrounded a ring of skin like dried parchment. In the whole expression of the face was a wasting eagerness that was disquieting — pitiful. It was as though an inward fire might at any moment break out and consume the emaciated features.

After a moment of mutual contemplation, the monk broke the silence.

"I am *Father* Vincent, my son!" he said, laying emphasis upon the word "father."

"Your pardon, father," was the courteous reply. "Priest or friar, you are welcome to Beaulieu."

"I have come from beyond the Rhine to see you," the priest went on. "I have a message of grave importance for your private ear."

"From beyond the Rhine!" exclaimed the count, in surprise. "Who has sent you, father? I can think of no one —"

"Nor am I the messenger of any mere human correspondent."

There was a solemnity in the nervous tones that awed the nobleman.

He paused, considering the speaker, half-uncertain of his reply. Then, with a gesture of invitation:

"Pray ascend, father," he said. "I will see you here in the reception-hall."

When the count and his strange visitor were alone together behind closed doors, the monk advanced to the middle of the room, and, turning to his host, spoke slowly and impressively:

"Count du Beaulieu, you see in me Father Vincent of Coruella."

He paused, and Du Beaulieu bowed gravely.

"Among men of learning, as well in France, Italy, and Spain as in the ruder cities of Germany, I am not unknown. For many years have I been a close student of the mysteries of astrology and alchemy. Cornelius Agrippa, formerly my teacher, now knows in me only a costudent."

Again the count bowed, this time with awakening interest.

"Before entering further upon my message," the priest continued, drawing a roll or parchment from within his frock, "let me be sure that I have made no mistake. I understand that I am speaking to Armand, seventh Count of Beaulieu, whose wife was born Yvonne de Bersier."

The count frowned darkly.

"Yes, what of it?" he asked.

At that moment there was a sound of bustling in the hall below, and the babble of several voices.

Then came the slow tramp of a compact g
approaching, as though a heavy burden were
carried past the door.

The two men turned with a look of in
toward the hall, and the count was about to
to the door when some one knocked.

"Come in," cried the count.

The seneschal appeared, all out of breath
embroidered coat disarranged and his face r

"My lord," he panted, bowing, "I crave pa
— my excuse is — a dying man — murder
under our — our very walls. He needs a — a
fessor. I knew that — "

The count cut him short:

"Enough!" he exclaimed. "You were
to come at once."

Then turning to Father Vincent:

"Will you follow my steward, father?" he
tinued. "A traveller has met with foul pla
need not point out your duty, I am sure."

With a frown, the monk thrust the roll
his bosom, and silently followed the excited ser

The master of the house called in the grou
whispering men at his door and questioned
closely as to what had happened.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TWIN EMERALD

THE wounded man had been carried to the seneschal's room, and it was here that his senses gradually returned.

As he languidly opened his eyes, he found himself lying upon a high narrow bed, whose tall canopy seemed lost in the shadows of the sharply vaulted stone ceiling.

Two men-at-arms stood beside him, but he could not see their faces, for the torches that lighted the room were behind them.

In the bewilderment and pain of returning consciousness, the wounded stranger could only close his eyes again, and wonder where he was and what had brought him this half-waking torment.

Slowly he recollected the struggle, the triumph almost achieved — and then — what?

One of the soldiers was speaking. As the sufferer listened, he realized that he lay within the

castle of Beaulieu. These men spoke of him as dying. They had sent for a confessor.

More rapidly his strength was returning now, and he began to reason.

His brother, the Baron de Pompelac, had disappeared two days before. He had traced him to Beaulieu, and now fortune had favoured him so far as to admit him into the castle. He was convinced that only here could he solve the mystery of De Pompelac's disappearance.

They had sent for the count's confessor, it seemed. Surely it would go hard, but he would gain the information he sought from a priest!

The door was opened. Some one whispered, and the two men-at-arms clanked across the floor. Then the door closed again, and a slow, shuffling step approached the bed.

Delmar lay on his back motionless, his eyes closed, and his hands limp at his sides, palm down. Without seeing, he knew that he was alone with the confessor.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by a quick gasp, and Delmar felt his left hand violently caught and roughly lifted.

Instinctively he leaped to a sitting posture and opened his eyes, reaching for his dagger with his free hand, but finding only an empty scabbard.

Leaning over him was a tall, thin monk clad in a black frock. The torches poured their uneven light upon his eager, excited face, thrust close to Delmar's own, which was in shadow.

"Quick! Where did you get this?"

With a frenzied movement, the monk shook the hand he had grasped, and pointed at the emerald ring.

Half-bewildered, half in cool insolence, Delmar gazed long at his eager questioner. Then he sought to withdraw his hand.

"A strange confessor, truly!" he began, in a quiet voice. Then more impatiently, he continued: "Will you release my hand, father, or shall I take it that you mean me ill?"

The monk, still glaring excitedly at the ring, withdrew his grasp and stood erect.

"They brought me to a dying penitent," he said, "and I find a lusty criminal."

The wounded man uttered a sharp exclamation of anger, and, feeling again for his dagger, sought to leap to his feet. But he was still faint and weak, and the monk easily pushed him back upon the bed.

"Sit there and explain!" he snarled. "I came to receive your confession. Well, I am ready. Tell me first where and how you obtained possession of that ring!"

"You are very curious — "

"No useless insolence!" cried the priest, actually shaking Delmar by the shoulder in his rage. "I know that ring. It belonged to the Baron de Pompelac. Have you murdered him? Speak!"

"Who are you?" cried Delmar, excited in his turn.

In mad impatience, the monk threw up his hands. Then he sped swiftly to where the torches were held by iron sockets in the further wall.

"At least I'll see your face!" he cried.

When the monk returned with the flaring torch, the cavalier had risen to his feet, and his features were plainly revealed in the bright light.

"I am Louis Delmar — and you?"

"Louis Delmar!"

For a moment the priest stood motionless. Then he advanced and scanned the soldier's face carefully.

"Yes! It is true! And the ring — "

"It is the twin of my brother's."

The monk's expression quieted at once. He turned and replaced the torch in its socket. Then, advancing slowly and with folded hands, —

"Forgive me, my son. My zeal led me astray," he said.

"Willingly, father!" Delmar replied, sitting upon

the bedside once more. "But tell me how it is that the chaplain of Beaulieu — "

"I am not the chaplain of Beaulieu. My name is Vincent — Vincent of Coruella."

Delmar leaned forward excitedly.

"Vincent of Coruella!" he exclaimed. "My brother's closest friend!"

"Your brother's devoted slave!" exclaimed the monk, with deep fervour. "You know my history?"

Delmar nodded.

"I know that De Pompelac saved you from the Inquisition — " he began.

"And he saved my mother, too!" the monk broke in. "Since then I have been his servant, living near him, working his will in secret — keeping back in obscurity — that he might prosper in the light."

"Indeed, you speak truly!" said Delmar, smiling. "So much in the dark have you lived that in all these years, although I have known of you and watched your deeds, never until to-day have I seen your face. And so you are Father Vincent!" he continued, half-incredulous. "What a strange fortune brings us thus together — here under a hostile roof."

The priest glanced quickly into the other's eyes.

"Hostile — yes. You feel it too, then?"

Delmar looked about carefully, and spoke even lower than before.

"Are you also seeking him?" he asked. "What do you know?"

"I will tell you. We must work together."

Father Vincent seated himself upon the bed, and, pressing his hands together between his knees, looked straight before him.

"Let me see," he began. "This is Tuesday. Last Sunday morning, your brother came to the monastery and told me that he had seen young De Bersier at a window in Beaulieu castle — "

"What!" cried Delmar. "Then De Bersier had been here before!"

"You have seen him?" asked the priest, eagerly.

"Yes — to-night — it was while — But go on. Tell your tale first, then you shall know mine."

"You are right. De Pompelac told me that he had seen De Bersier at the window of the countess's private room. I long have known of the feud between your brother and young De Bersier — "

"A feud which I share — a feud to the death!"

The monk nodded, and smiled slightly.

"Yes," he said, "I have known of the feud, and

know its cause. You may imagine De Pompelac's excitement at his discovery.

"He had devised a plan to force the Countess du Beaulieu to betray where it was her brother was hiding — for, of course, he guessed at once that De Bersier came in behalf of the king, and would receive a spy's treatment if discovered.

"Your brother's plan was this. He would meet the countess on her return from church, and tell her of his discovery. He guessed that they were to meet again, and his design was to demand that she arrange a meeting between himself and De Bersier. She knows nothing of your feud, and he thought she would consent — but he was ready for a refusal.

"He asked me to write for him a brief anonymous note, warning the Count du Beaulieu that his wife was receiving a lover in her eastern tower. This, in the event of her refusal, he intended to show her, threatening to have it conveyed to her jealous husband, unless she consented to disclose her brother's hiding-place.

"I wrote the note he asked for. He took it, promising to let me know the result of his attempt before last night. I know that he came hither yesterday at noon. I know that the countess was shortly afterward driven to the convent of St. Cecilia, where she is a prisoner under strict guard. But De Pom-

pelac has disappeared. No one has seen him at his castle since yesterday morning. I am here to find him."

"But how gained you admittance?"

"I am an astrologer from Germany and am bringing the credulous count a message from the stars. Trust me to win a place here very close to his lordship."

The two men smiled meaningly into each other's eyes.

"My tale is as short and as simple as yours," said the cavalier.

"This morning I returned to Pompelac after a year's absence with business friends —"

"Moors?" queried the monk, with a sly look from the corner of his eye.

"What!" exclaimed Delmar, "has my brother —"

"Yes — I know that you are the partner of Morisco pirates. That you decoy and betray into their hands valuable Christian slaves for good Saracen gold. Alas! How many tender maidens have disappeared from our sunny coast lands for whose loss Louis Delmar could give account if he would!"

The cavalier laughed lightly.

"I see you are well informed," said he. "Yes,

I have been fairly successful. French girls bring a high price in Africa. But the present troubles have increased the activity of the French fleet. Andrea Doria is in our way. Consequently I determined to pay my brother a visit and, as I said before, I reached his castle this morning. To my surprise, I found him absent and his servants in a state of alarm. I learned that he was last seen departing for Beaulieu yesterday before noon.

"I determined to come in search of him. Reaching this castle not much more than half an hour ago, I was standing without the walls pondering on my next step, when I saw a peasant approaching from the surrounding woods. I accosted him in the hope of gaining useful information, when, to my amazement, I found him to be a gentleman in disguise — "

"De Bersier!" exclaimed the monk, striking his knee with conviction.

"You have guessed it!" cried Delmar, in surprise.

"You quarrelled and he overpowered you!"

"No, no! There you are at fault!" cried the young man, proudly. "We did indeed quarrel, but I had succeeded in pinning him helpless to the ground when I was struck senseless by a blow from an unseen foe."

"Some one struck you," said the monk, slowly. "Had you seen any one else there?"

"No, the spot seemed deserted."

The monk mused a few moments in silence. There came to him the recollection of that man in the castle moat. But he had come out of some opening in the wall, and had not had time to join in a struggle before crossing the bridge.

Then he remembered the low voices he had heard as he stood in the doorway. Some one else had left the castle with this mysterious man — or had met him by the moat. Could this other person have struck the blow which felled Delmar?

"My son," he said at length, "there is some plot here, and your brother appears to have been its first victim."

"From what you have told me," replied Delmar, "I am convinced of it. Can Gregory have been killed, and has the count extended his malice to me?"

"Nothing so simple," said Father Vincent, shaking his head pensively. "I was with the count when you were struck. I observed him when news of your accident reached him. He knows not even who you are. No, it looks as though the countess had imprisoned your brother, or spirited him away in the hope of preventing his conveying his message to her

lord. In some way, the note reached the count in spite of her, and she was sent to the convent — but then — why did the count not kill her? Ah! Perhaps he is hunting for the supposed lover!"

"Then you think that De Pompelac is imprisoned somewhere here?"

"Here or elsewhere. They would not kill him. The count has no quarrel with your brother, has he?"

"None, that I am aware of."

"No," the monk repeated, positively. "There can be none, or I would have known of it."

There was a minute of silence.

"I will pursue my original design," said the monk at length, with decision.

"And I?" queried Delmar.

The stronger mind of the priest already dominated the young cavalier.

"I beg that you will remain here for the present. Feign great weakness. Pocket that telltale ring, and do not reveal your name. When I have conferred with the count again, I shall know better what course you should pursue."

"Can I not aid you? Is there nothing I can do to aid in finding my brother?"

"Not now. Only help me by adopting my plan, I beseech you!"

The young man hesitated. He looked about him fiercely, as though the walls might be coerced into giving up their secret. Then he looked into the bright, masterful eyes of the priest, and bowed his head.

"So be it," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PRACTICAL ASTROLOGER

Not unwillingly, Delmar threw himself upon the bed. His part of invalid would be only half-acted. Not fully recovered from the blow he had received, the excitement of the conference with Father Vincent had left him trembling with weakness and with an aching head.

The priest nodded a farewell, and softly left the room, closing the door behind him.

He paused, with his hand still upon the latch. The Count du Beaulieu was speaking to some one, and his voice came along the stone corridors as though through a speaking-tube. To the keen-witted monk, every word overheard might be a clue to what he sought.

The person addressed seemed a new arrival, for he was being welcomed. He was a subordinate. This was clear from the master's language.

The words of welcome concluded with a question.

"Did you find your mother well, Le Ferrailleur?"

"Quite well, I thank your lordship."

The reply was in a man's deep tones. The monk thought it a soldier's voice.

"Good!" said the count. "I believe you are ready for immediate departure, then. You need no orders at present, I think."

There was a reply, but it was in a tone so indistinct and low that the impatient listener could understand nothing.

The count seemed surprised at the soldier's speech. His feeling was evident in the tone of his rejoinder.

"What!" he said, sternly. "You heard my orders touching that woman, did you not? I swore you to secrecy when I gave those orders last night."

"But, my lord, has she spoken?" The soldier's words were clear now.

"She will speak. They are questioning her now."

The highly strung mind of the subtle priest drew in the meaning of every word and every tone.

Some one had been condemned to the question. Father Vincent knew of De Pompelac's note. He sprang at once to the conclusion that this note formed the subject of the inquisition. They had spoken of a woman. Only one woman could be assumed to know the supposed lover. It must be the lady's maid.

All this passed swiftly through the monk's mind before the soldier spoke again.

"My lord — I hope — I mean — They will not be too hard!" The words were spoken in seeming hesitation. Le Ferrailleur had a part to play.

"That will do!" the master broke in. "Did I not know you were her lover, I would not brook so much. Go to your quarters!"

Her lover! The monk glided quickly forward. He intended to gain a footing in this mysterious house, and he determined to know as quickly as possible those who dwelt there, and what they were to each other.

As Father Vincent reached the corner of the hallway, he saw the soldier leaving the count's room. He stopped suddenly in astonishment.

This soldier was the man of the moat and the drawbridge. It was Le Ferrailleur's face the monk had seen so clearly as he waited at the great door of the castle. Now he recognized it at once. But this soldier was now dressed as became his calling. Why had he before been travestied in coarse homespun? Why had he left the castle — landing in a dry moat? Had not the count asked him of his mother, and welcomed him back to the castle as a favoured servant returning from a distance?

As Albert left his master's room, all unconscious

of the monk's presence, he smiled slyly, and shook his head, thinking, no doubt, of how cleverly he had duped the count.

This smile was not lost upon Father Vincent. With swift logic he sought for its reason. Here was a man whose mistress was even then undergoing the torture. He had been begging in her behalf for leniency, and had been dismissed with a reprimand. And yet — he left with a smile of cunning pleasure.

To the priest that smile made one thing certain. The lady's maid had escaped. The soldier knew it. The master had not yet learned it.

Then, as he stood in thought, he recalled the two voices he had heard and the mysterious unknown assailant of Delmar. Could it be that the moat had been emptied on purpose by this bold soldier-lover, and that it had been the maid's escape that the monk had witnessed?

A minute passed in silent review of every fact. Then the priest lifted his head and stepped boldly forward.

"It is so probable that I will venture on it," he said, under his breath.

A moment later he was face to face with the lord of the castle.

"I am glad to find you alone, my son," Father Vincent began at once. "Your wounded guest is

sorely hurt, but will not die, I am sure. Forgive my abrupt return, but my duty is by your side, for a great danger threatens you."

The count seated himself, and replied, with a veiled irritation:

"I go to the war to-morrow, father. A soldier expects danger."

"But not to his honour!"

The nobleman looked up with a dark frown, but the keen black eyes of the priest met his own firmly, and seemed to sound his mind.

"In my German home I read my horoscope, and found my fate linked with the French branch of the ducal house of Meinigen. The lady Sophia von Meinigen married a De Bersier, and her daughter is your wife."

"Well!"

"I inquired touching her birth, and my science taught me this."

Father Vincent brought forth the scroll again, and handed it to the count.

Du Beaulieu opened the parchment and found an astrological chart, accompanied by an explanatory writing in Latin.

"Pray, read it to me," he said, returning the scroll. "I am not well versed in Latin."

His voice was uneasy. What this foreign priest

had already said showed that he knew more than seemed explicable.

"I will translate it. These are the words that I wrote for your information ere I left Germany. God grant my haste has not been in vain!"

He unrolled the parchment, and in a slow, solemn tone read the following words:

"Yvonne de Bersier's star lingers in the house of Capricorn. On the one hand Mercury approached, while the planet Venus is in the ascendant. Within the house of Libra stands the fatal planet Saturn. Only one meaning can result from these conjunctions. A surreptitious lover threatens the honour of Du Beaulieu, and Yvonne herself is about to yield to the power of unholy love."

Du Beaulieu gave vent to a hoarse growl of anger, but did not speak. With clenched hands, he leaned forward and glared at the priest.

"Yes, yes, I know, my son. My words are terrible. But they are the message of God, written in the glittering heavens. Beware! Guard your honour. Trust not to weak woman. Satan is powerful, and who is free from sin?"

Du Beaulieu leaped to his feet with a short moan of agony.

"God!" he cried.

With rapid steps he paced up and down the room.

What did this mean? Why had this foreigner come so far to give him this warning? He could not doubt his science. Astrology was recognized and trusted as implicitly as geometry. Had he doubted, indeed, such a warning at such a time would have convinced him.

The cunning priest saw into his victim's mind and pushed his advantage.

"But I can tell you more, my son," he continued. "In Germany I could not learn the date and hour of your birth. Give me these, and I can tell you what you should do. I can see into your past and foretell your future."

The nobleman paused, and looked fixedly at his interlocutor, thinking deeply.

He could put this mysterious stranger to the proof, and, if his science were sound, learn from the monk what his lady's maid refused to tell. Yes — perhaps more than she knew. He hesitated, but, after a minute of thought, decided to acquiesce.

"I was born on the twelfth of December, 1492," he said.

"And the hour?"

"I do not know. I have heard that it was early in the morning."

"A pity! A great pity!" exclaimed the monk, shaking his head. "With no more than you have

told me I can see but darkly. So much depends upon the exact position of your star. Still, I will try."

A pen and a horn of ink stood upon the table. The monk seated himself, and began to sketch a chart rapidly upon the back of the parchment he had brought with him.

Du Beaulieu stood rigidly, facing his guest, watching every movement of the swiftly moving pen. The untutored mind of the soldier was an easy prey to him who combined the authority of a supposed science with that of the Church. Doubt in such a case seemed to lie near to sacrilege.

At length the priest ceased sketching and sat studying his work, his face showing every sign of rapt attention.

"This is a sorry sight!" he said, after a long pause. "I see that I have come too late."

He looked up and scanned Du Beaulieu's face. He was met by a grimly passive gaze.

"Go on!" said the count, hoarsely.

"Yvonne du Beaulieu has fallen."

There was a threatening growl. The priest looked up quickly.

His victim had advanced to the table and was leaning over it, with burning eyes bent fiercely upon the parchment.

"Proceed quickly, man! The villain's name! Give me his name!"

"That I cannot see," said the priest. "If I only knew the hour of your birth —" He paused, as if in vexation.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "Here is a clue!"

"The winged helmet!" cried the tortured husband, forgetting all caution, and ascribing to the priest his own uppermost thought.

Father Vincent grasped the situation instantly; not betraying by the slightest sign the satisfaction he felt in the important fact he had just noted.

"Yes — a winged helmet. A message, too. You have received a warning from a friend!"

"But the winged helmet, father. What of that?"

"Wait — A woman holds the secret. She is of humble birth."

There was a long pause. The count stood motionless, his fingers gripping the table, his teeth clenched in a violent effort to control his impatience.

Suddenly the priest looked up into his host's face, and said:

"You had this witness in your power. She refused to tell the truth. You gave her to the torture."

As he proceeded, he read the corroboration of

his theory in the count's face. The next step was conjectural, but he took it boldly.

"The inquisitor has been overpowered," he said, positively, "and your witness has escaped."

"Escaped! Impossible!"

The count stepped back a pace. Doubt began to assert itself.

"It is true," the monk asserted.

"But I tell you it is not true, father. Your science is at fault. I myself heard her first scream of agony."

"How long ago?"

"Half an hour or more."

"There was but one cry?"

"Yes."

This convinced the monk that he was right. He knew more of the torture than did Beaulieu. With a joy he could scarcely conceal, he came directly to the point he had had in view from the beginning.

"My son," he said, solemnly, "there remains but one thing for you to do. It is a clear duty. You must avenge the loss of your honour."

"Show me the man!"

"At this moment I cannot name him. But I know I can lead you to him in time, and on further acquaintance with your life and your friends. My science tells me that you will find him at the war.

Take me into your household. Give me your confidence, and I give you my guarantee that you will find your wife's seducer."

"The maid will tell me. She knows who dropped the embroidered handkerchief."

Only a momentary gleam of the eye marked the monk's appreciation of this last piece of information. So — it was a handkerchief that was marked with the winged helmet! He was beginning to understand it all. All but the disappearance of De Pompelac.

"The maid will tell you nothing, my son," he said, quietly. "I have already told you that she has escaped from the castle. You will not find her again."

The count shook his head.

"Well, let us make a bargain, my son. I feel that my duty is to see this strange episode to an end. Here is my proposition. If you find that I am right — if the witness has escaped — you will accede to my request, and take me into your household — "

"Father," the count broke in, "if you are not mistaken, I shall have no right to doubt your mission to my house. You will have proved that you have the power to guide me truly in this abyss. If you are right, you shall be my chaplain and con-

fessor. Father Paul left me to-day. You shall take his place. But if you are in error — "

"I leave here at once. But, my son, the stars never lie."

Du Beaulieu struck a gong that stood before him. A servant knocked, and entered on command.

"Send Le Ferrailleur here."

The soldier was near at hand, and appeared promptly.

"Take that candle and lead the way to Gilberte's prison."

With a surprised glance at the stranger, Albert obeyed. Father Vincent looked for the third time at the handsome young soldier, and smiled inwardly. He had noted the maid's name for future reference.

Together the three men descended the great stairs to the entrance-hall, and, passing through a stout door into a side corridor, they bent their steps toward the dungeon in which Gilberte had been confined.

Suddenly Albert lowered his light with a cry of well-assumed amazement. The two others hurried forward, and found him stooping over a small man in black, who lay upon the floor, securely bound and gagged.

The count turned instantly and threw himself

upon the dungeon door. The heavy mass of iron turned slowly upon its rusty hinges. Du Beaulieu took the candle in his hand and advanced into the room, looking eagerly in every corner.

It was empty.

The count crossed himself in superstitious dread.

"She has fled through the walls!" he said. "The woman is a sorceress!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE MARCH

"AWAKE! my son — awake! There is no time to be lost!"

Delmar awoke to find Father Vincent leaning over him and shaking him gently by the shoulder.

"What — what is it?" he exclaimed, confused and startled. The room was dark, and for a moment he had no idea where he was.

"Hush! They must not hear you. It is Father Vincent. You are in the castle of Beaulieu."

Now fully aroused, Delmar sat up in bed, master of all his faculties. Sound sleep and natural good health had cured even his aching head.

"Yes, yes. I know now," he said, in an undertone. "What have you discovered, father? Why do you wake me thus?"

"I know much, and yet too little. You must help me to complete my knowledge. Listen. I have learned that the countess is believed to have enter-

tained a lover, whose crest is a winged helmet. Her maid was put to the torture to discover his name, but she has escaped. I have satisfied Du Beaulieu of my power as an astrologer, and he has made me his chaplain."

"His chaplain! But Father Paul —"

"Has resigned. I suspect the reason. Fortune has provided an unexpected opportunity for learning what has been done to De Pompelac, of whom as yet I know nothing. The count sets off for the war to-morrow morning early — in a few hours."

"He will escape us!" said Delmar, excitedly.

"Nay, he will walk into our trap. I have told him that he would find the winged helmet at the war. He believes me implicitly. I go with him, and our first stopping-place is Lyons."

"Lyons!" cried the younger man, in amazement. "But the king is there with all his court!"

"Hush, hush! You say truth, but the count has accepted my suggestion. My reasoning was this: 'The king,' I said, 'knows not your attachment to the Bourbon. Your wife's family is noted for loyalty. To get from here to Franche-Comte, where Bourbon awaits you, your forces must scatter, and some of you will be caught by the vigilance of the king's spies and soldiers. If, on the contrary, you appear all together in Lyons, ostensibly to join the

royal forces, a large part of your journey is accomplished with ease, and a quick dash to the northeast from Lyons will carry you to your destination safely through a country little guarded.' Du Beaulieu saw the force of this argument, and will act upon it."

"The plan is indeed a capital one!" said Delmar, bitterly. "You seem to have shown our enemy the way to safety. Have you forgotten my brother?"

"You know little of Father Vincent," was the calm reply. "I happen to know that the name of every Bourbon noble in this vicinity has been sent by the Bishop of Parsy to the king."

Delmar uttered a sharp exclamation of satisfaction.

"Ah! You understand me now! Let us but get Du Beaulieu to Lyons, and he will be in our power. He will be arrested with all his force, and it will go hard, but we will learn the truth touching De Pompelac."

"Indeed, father, you cannot fail!" exclaimed Delmar.

"Yes, without your aid I might, for Du Beaulieu will have me closely watched until he knows me better. You must go to Lyons before us and notify Warthy of Du Beaulieu's approach."

"But how can I? My horse —"

"Your horse was stolen. You must leave at once, secretly. Go afoot to Pompelac, and there take horse for Lyons. You will start with some miles in your favour, and can travel fast, while the count and his train must march slowly."

"Yes — but the guards at the door?"

"Here? The guards!" The priest laughed quietly. "My son, in peace times these worthy guards spend their nights in sweet slumber. The door is locked, but I will help you through the open vent above it. The drawbridge has not been raised."

"Good!" cried the cavalier, leaping to the floor. "I will follow you in five minutes."

Through the dense obscurity of the stone corridors the two conspirators stole noiselessly to the entrance-hall. Here, as Father Vincent had said, they found two soldiers snoring comfortably upon their wooden benches.

A minute later Delmar dropped from the round opening above the door into the deep embrasure that opened upon the drawbridge. He looked about him.

The first gray of early dawn seemed to breathe through night's darkness in a dry south wind. All was silent about the castle. No one was in sight.

The young man turned, and, stooping to the keyhole, breathed an "all's well." Then he walked

rapidly across the bridge on his way to Pompelac.

The monk lingered only to hear Delmar's last word, and then turned to the room which had been assigned to him, where he lay down for an hour's sleep before the early breakfast preceding Du Beaulieu's march.

Upon a single stone arch the Lyons road crossed the narrow stream which fed Tavant's water-wheel. The picturesque stone mill stood a short distance below the bridge, hiding behind a yearly thickening screen of ivy. Through its two round windows, the complacent wall seemed to gaze at its own comely reflection in the stream, with the self-satisfied beam of a stone Narcissus.

Within the dusky depths of one of these openings there might be descried two figures — a friar in a white frock and a young woman.

They were watching an armed procession as it crossed the stream, and, although they looked on in silence, they were evidently deeply interested in those whom they watched.

At the head rode a knight clad in steel armour, and by his side a squire carried a banner bearing the device of Beaulieu; a hound's head with the motto, "*Je guête.*"

Then came a long double file of men-at-arms, clad in leathern jerkins and cuirasses, and mounted upon stout horses.

The onlookers could plainly discern each face, and even the words of the passing men were often intelligible.

Upon one stalwart form and stern visage the watching woman fixed her eyes tenderly, and, as a bend in the road hid the passing soldier, she threw a kiss after him, and laughed a little hysterically.

The monk stepped forward at this moment and peered eagerly from the window.

"What is this? It is — it is he! The Dominican — Vincent de Coruella!"

"Who? Where, Father Paul?"

Gilberte stepped forward, and leaned out of the window.

Father Paul drew her quickly back.

"No imprudence, child!" he exclaimed. "You must not be seen now. Look! See that Dominican monk in his black frock riding behind the men-at-arms! The count has given him the place I filled. Alas! What doom is in store for the house of Beaulieu! By what arts can that man have won my lord's confidence thus swiftly?"

"Father! Can it be true?" cried Gilberte, gazing fiercely at the strange, swarthy face of this monk

who had usurped Father Paul's position. "Oh, my master is mad — mad! To dismiss you — you — our father — our saint — and call to his side that bird of ill omen. He is a demon, father. I see it in his face!"

Father Paul shook his head with a boding look.

"I fear you gauge him but too truly, my daughter. Keep that face in your mind, for some day you may meet him again. If you do, remember this. He is a villain — a dangerous rogue! Alas, that I should say it of a priest of God and Our Lady!"

The last wagon turned into the wood beyond the bridge. Du Beaulieu had departed, and in those two faithful hearts were foreshadowed in grief and dark forebodings the future years in store for him.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CHANGE OF PROGRAMME

DU BEAULIEU'S little troop reached Lyons too late that night to enter the gates. It was therefore decided to encamp upon the right bank of the Rhone, and to cross the river the next morning.

A number of peasants loitered about the camp as the tents were being put up, some with milk or fruit for sale, others merely idlers, gazing at the busy men-at-arms out of pure curiosity.

Father Vincent sat a little apart upon a stone, his eyes fixed upon the river and the reflection of the city lights. There was a half-smile upon his face as he thought of the morrow and of the surprise in store for the simple count.

One of the village loiterers moved carelessly to the shelter of a tree, some yards behind the monk, and then glanced warily about to see if any one were watching him.

Unobserved in the deepening twilight, he stopped and gathered a handful of small pebbles. These he threw gently, one at a time, toward the priest. The first fell a yard to the right, and the second as far to the left, but the third struck Father Vincent's back.

The monk recognized this as some signal, and slowly turned to look over his shoulder, careful to exhibit no excitement.

At this the peasant beckoned once with his hand, and, turning his back, left the tree to walk toward the edge of the woods.

Without hurry, Father Vincent rose, and, after another long look at the city, turned and sauntered to where the peasant was awaiting him. As he entered the wood the countryman stepped from behind a bush.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "I have been fortunate!"

"Monsieur Delmar!"

"Yes! As you see! Our plan has failed, father."

"Failed!"

"Yes. By hard riding I reached here early this afternoon, having eaten no food to-day, and with a horse ruined for life, I fear. I sent word at once to Warthy, who, as you may have heard, is most in-

dustrious and zealous against Bourbon. I learned that he is not in the city, but that the best person to whom I could address myself was the Vicomte de Pontois, who is Warthy's confidant. For certain good reasons, I did not communicate directly with De Pontois, but sent a messenger to say that the Count du Beaulieu was on his way to Lyons, whence he intended to make his way to Franche-Comte to join Bourbon. My messenger returned, and what do you think he said?"

"How can I imagine?"

"Why, he reported that De Pontois had laughed in his face, telling him that Du Beaulieu was known to be loyal, and that his coming to join the king in Lyons was proof of it. My messenger — whom I had posted — asked if there had been any news received from the direction of Beaulieu, and De Pontois showed him openly a list of names of those from Du Beaulieu's vicinity who were followers of Bourbon — and Count Armand was not in the list!"

"It is impossible!" exclaimed Father Vincent, with the greatest energy. "Why, man, the secretary of the Bishop of Parsy conferred with me when he was making up the list which was sent to Warthy. I mentioned Du Beaulieu myself, and saw the name written down."

Delmar shrugged his shoulders.

"Father, I tell you what occurred. That is all I know."

The monk knit his brows and pondered.

"There is but one explanation!" he exclaimed at length. "You have had to act through intermediaries, and De Pontois has misled your man. Warthy knows the truth. When does he return?"

"He is not expected for three days, or more, perhaps."

"We must detain the count, and gain time to stir up suspicion in the mind of the king against him. I fear, my son, that you did not use a man of much influence as a messenger. If you had, in times like these, the very accusation would have sufficed for an arrest."

"I did all I could. My position in Lyons at this moment is none of the safest, I assure you."

"Well — I shall be able to use stronger weapons, but I shall need time, and I fear it will be difficult for me to detain the count — "

"Listen, father!" Delmar broke in. "I did not trouble myself to meet you here in this disguise simply to inform you that our plan had failed. I have already formed a project, which, with your influence and craft and my resources here in Lyons,

should enable us to hold the count until Warthy returns, and to do this under such circumstances as will go far to prove the count's treason."

"That is better. I am listening."

"You have only to tell the count to-morrow, after he has entered the city, that you have discovered that a full list of rebels has been sent to Lyons from Parsy. Tell him that every gate is watched by men having this list in their hands, and that he will be reported to the king. Then induce him to give orders to his men to disperse and rejoin him in Franche-Comte, telling him that you have friends who can smuggle him down the river and around the king's forces. These excellent friends I will supply. They will be in a boat at the foot of the Rue des Couleuvres to-morrow at sunset, and will have orders to wait for you and the count. The rest I will perform. What say you?"

"The plan is excellent, and must succeed. It is our only hope of bringing the count to reveal the secret of your brother's disappearance."

Delmar was much pleased, and, taking Father Vincent warmly by the hand, he said:

"Good night, father. Remember, then — At any time after sunset to-morrow, at the foot of the Rue des Couleuvres. May I be remembered in your prayers."

With a light, springing stride, the young man sprang through the open, to the road. Father Vincent looked after him, and shook his head.

"Very little like a peasant's gait!" he muttered.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE NOOSE TIGHTENS

WHEN the river gate was opened at sunrise on the morrow, the first to ride into the city was Le Ferrailleur, who had been despatched by his master to look for quarters for the count and his men. He found the city overflowing with soldiers, priests, and camp-followers, and it was only by dint of the utmost industry, and by virtue of an infinite assurance, that he was able to secure a room in a second-class inn for Du Beaulieu. As for men-at-arms, he was told, they were being quartered with the small farmers in the outskirts of the town.

Du Beaulieu might have found a welcome at any one of a number of noble houses, but he feared that, when he was discovered to have joined the rebel cause, those who had afforded him hospitality would fall under suspicion.

When, therefore, he received Le Ferrailleur's

report, he decided to accept the lowly quarters of the inn, and to leave his men in camp, sending them provisions from the city.

"You see, father," he explained to Father Vincent, "I must make my appearance in Lyons for a day at least, in order to give colour to my coming. I shall be better able to determine upon the next step to be taken when I have been in the city."

"Your judgment seems to be excellent," said the priest. "With your leave, I will accompany you. I can surely find accommodation at some monastery for the night."

"I was going to ask you to do so," said the count.

Preparations were soon made, and Du Beaulieu entered the gate a little before noon, with Father Vincent at his side, and followed by only one attendant. This was the faithful Albert, who carried his master's portmanteau in front of him upon the saddle-bow.

At the inn Father Vincent left his companion, and when Du Beaulieu had established himself in his narrow and dirty quarters, he sallied forth to show himself in the town, Le Ferrailleur following a few yards behind him.

He would, of course, be expected to pay his respects at court, but, for a soldier on the march, one day's postponement was easily explainable on the

score of delay in movement of baggage. In that one day the count hoped to mature his plans for his eastward dash.

Accordingly, he bent his steps first to the eastern-most gate, where he soon made himself known to the officer of the guard. He was received with the utmost civility, and over a bottle of wine the young officer proved very communicative.

In the course of their conversation, Du Beaulieu learned that some of the nobles then in the city frequently left by that gate early in the morning to hunt the foxes which were numerous on that side of the city.

Here was a capital pretext for taking his whole troop through the gate unchallenged, especially as the officer of the guard was his friend.

Du Beaulieu committed himself to nothing at the time, however, but returned to his inn, thinking it well to consider his plan before acting.

At the door of the inn he met Father Vincent, who begged the count to take him to his room, where they might talk alone.

Once there, the priest carefully closed the door, and, drawing the count to the open window, that their words might be lost in the city's din, he said, with anxious earnestness:

"My son, I have received news of the most

alarming import! At the convent of St. Dominic I was courteously received by the abbot, from whose willing conversation I learned to my horror, that Warthy received two days ago a complete list of the nobles whose lands adjoin Parsy, and who have declared themselves for Bourbon. As I had not yet disclosed my connection with you, the abbot told me that your name was one of those on the list, a copy of which he had seen. These copies, with other lists, are being distributed to-day at all the gates of the city. You can see your position for yourself!"

"An interesting one, surely," was the dry rejoinder. "Fortunately I am incognito at this inn, but my plan for leaving by the eastern gate to-morrow cannot be carried out."

"Your plan?"

"Yes; a pretended hunting sally at sunrise. I have just left the officer of the guard at that gate, with whom I am acquainted."

"Holy Mother! Did you tell him where you were lodging?"

The count laughed.

"No, father. I am not proud of my hotel!"

"So much the better! Now, what are you going to do?"

Du Beaulieu slowly tugged at his beard, looking pensively from the window.

"What would you advise?" he said, at length. "I do not forget that this route was adopted by your advice, you see."

"Nor I, my son; and I count upon my plan succeeding, for I have set my heart upon it!"

The priest spoke these ambiguous words with an earnestness which left no doubt of his zeal.

Du Beaulieu seated himself upon a stool and looked up into the priest's face.

"Your confidence is comforting at such a time," he said. "What do you propose?"

"This, my son. Do you give your men orders to disperse, dividing your treasure among those you can trust, and appointing a rendezvous for all in Franche-Comté. In this I but recommend the plan which I understand Bourbon has adopted with his immediate followers. This done, do you wait concealed here until dark. Then I will take you to a boat which I can provide, and in which we will be safely conveyed down the river to a point from which we can pass around the city."

"But my horse?"

"Give him to Albert to bring to you in Franche-Comté. You must buy a new one in the morning. Trust me, this is the only safe plan. While you wait here, I will procure the boat and its crew. I know

four men, who, if they are still in town, will do anything I ask. I will also get clothes more suitable for obscure travelling than those you wear."

"Well," said Du Beaulieu, "the plan seems a good one. Let us find Albert."

Le Ferrailleur was called, and the plan decided upon was explained to him. He declared that he could answer for every man in the count's service, and it was decided to divide the money which the count had brought equally among his men, so that the capture of one or two would not result in the total loss of the sinews of war.

"As for you, Albert," said the count, "you will ride my own horse, and accompany the two wagons of stores. Leave behind all except what cannot well be replaced, and cover the rest with hay. You must procure a peasant's dress, and travel slowly, so as not to attract observation. Remember, too, that not more than two men must travel together. Let the order be for reunion as soon as safely possible at Clairvaux."

Le Ferrailleur kissed his master's hand with a lump in his throat, for well he knew that they might never see each other again. Then he left the inn, and was soon among the group of tents on the opposite side of the river.

When the sun set that night, the little encamp-

ment had vanished, and eighty mounted men were scattered in couples on their way to the rendezvous in Franche-Comté.

Father Vincent's plans were maturing.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON THE RIVER

At the foot of the Rue des Couleuvres, the river was lapping a shingle beach, whose stones were grinding under the monotonous steps of a man evidently in waiting.

The fellow's rough clothing and villainous face were mercifully hidden by the increasing obscurity aided by a mist which slowly moved in from the river.

Out of the fog, from the city side, came a dark figure in a formless frock. It descended the slope from the city, closely followed by another, taller, and of a soldierly appearance.

The man in front approached the pacing watchman.

"Is the boat ready?" he said, in a low voice.

The watcher turned without replying and whistled twice. In a few moments there glided in from the fog a shadow which quickly developed

into a rowboat manned by three men. When the prow of this craft touched the beach, the watcher stood at its bow and waited.

"These good fellows are prompt," said Father Vincent. "Will you enter first?"

Without a moment's hesitation, Du Beaulieu stepped into the boat, and the man on shore pushing off, leaped into the bow.

With four oarsmen and two passengers the little craft was somewhat overloaded.

Father Vincent pointed this out with a nervous laugh. No one answered him. One would have said that the boatmen were all dumb.

"However," the monk continued, "it is not for very long. Truly, we have ideal weather for an evasion, count."

Indeed, what with the night and the thickening mist, one could scarcely see two yards before the boat's bow. The shore was totally invisible.

The monk shivered a little, half with the night chill and half with nervous apprehension.

"How can you know when and where to turn toward the shore again?" he asked, addressing the boatmen.

"Silence!" some one said, gruffly, and the four pulled steadily and silently through the murky air.

After perhaps ten minutes of this progress, the

rowers stopped as with one accord, and listened intently.

Faintly from the east there came the tinkling of a little bell.

Together the four starboard oars caught the water, and then the boat was pulled quietly as before, but across the stream, and headed for the bank.

This signal from the shore the count could not quite understand.

"Was that bell a signal?"

There was a leaping shadow on their right — a cry — a tremendous grinding shock — and the count found himself struggling under the water.

After a minute of strangling and black confusion, his hand struck something hard. He grasped it desperately and his head emerged from the water. It was an oar.

"Here is one of them," said a man's voice in the boat which had run them down.

Strong arms dragged the dripping and crestfallen nobleman out of the water.

"That makes two," said another voice.

"Who is the other?" asked the count, when he could get his breath.

"It is I," said a weak, plaintive voice. It was Father Vincent.

Du Beaulieu looked about him. He was in a

small galley manned by six oarsmen, — a boat three times as big as the craft which had been run down.

They were drifting and the men were looking about anxiously over the water. It was useless, for the current was strong and nothing could be seen. The four oarsmen had disappeared.

Du Beaulieu made his way to the stern whence had come the voice of his companion.

He found the monk lying limply upon the bottom of the boat. Presently a lantern was lighted near at hand. Its bearer, carefully shielding the light from the shore with his hat, approached to examine the priest who was prostrated with terror.

The newcomer and Du Beaulieu were thus brought face to face with the lantern between them. As they looked into each other's eyes there was a mutual exclamation of recognition.

"Du Beaulieu!"

"De Calmere!"

"How came you here?"

"I am escaping from Lyons. And you?"

"*Pardie!* The same!"

The two friends clasped hands with a laugh.

The boatmen had given up further search, and the galley was moving slowly up the river against the current.

"You have destroyed my boat, monsieur. I must perforce claim your hospitality for awhile."

"Awhile, indeed! My dear count, why should we part? You and I travel to Franche-Comté together!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE WALL OF LODI

Two years had passed since Du Beaulieu's escape from Lyons.

It was the sunset hour of a February day in the year 1525 A. D. On the morrow, the imperial army under the supreme command of the Constable de Bourbon was to leave Lodi and move upon Milan.

Francis the First was with his army which, strongly entrenched, held the city of Pavia closely invested. Antonio de Leyva had made known the dire extremity to which the siege had brought him, and Bourbon hoped to draw Francis away to the defence of Milan.

Beside a watch-tower in one of the angles and on the summit of the town wall, there stood a Dominican friar, his black cowl hiding his features as he gazed westward.

The fertile plain stretched like a map before him.

For leagues ahead, and on either hand, no obstacle to vision arose.

Directly at his feet were clustered the great tents of the military chieftains: the Duke de Bourbon himself and his French adherents, the haughty Pescara, the gross Von Frundsberg, half-mad with bigoted hate, Del Vasto, Lannoy, and Castrioto.

These generals, swift in passion, jealous of each other, commanded various divisions of the immense host whose tents were spread before the monk's eyes that evening over a distance of five miles.

Beyond the tents of the generals were the German reiters, commanded by D'Ems, and the Burgundian cavalry, led by the Comte de Salms. Their horses could be seen picketed among the carpet-like strips of kitchen-gardens. The men were busy preparing their evening meal around their camp-fires. Beyond these forces were the dingy tents of the landsknechts, already dim in the evening mists, and, lastly, in the background, a thin line of water reflected the magical glory of the sunset sky. This was the Lambro.

To the right and left the great military settlement extended; a scene of unreal beauty in that soft evening light. Rows of poplars marked the roads dividing that great plain as far as vision extended, and everywhere were tents rosy with reflected light,

camp-fires still pale in the waning day, groups of lounging soldiers, hurrying messengers, mounted and afoot.

On every hand was the hum of life, gaiety, good cheer. One forgot in the glamour of it that every foot of ground had been the scene of battle following battle for centuries. This smiling landscape gave no expression to the gloomy truth, — the fact that here was a land never free from war, — ever tortured, yet ever coveted.

To that black-frocked watcher upon the wall, however, neither the beautiful vision nor the broad, unceasing hum of a host in camp was present in thought. His eyes were fixed upon a spot down in the southwest, toward Sant' Angelo, where a particular movement held his attention.

A small squadron of cavalry was galloping rapidly westward, apparently bent upon reaching a main road running north and south.

From the south two pursuing squadrons were moving; one of these being on the same side of the road, was visible to the pursued. The second troop, however, though visible from the town wall, was hidden from the escaping group by the poplars which fringed the road on either hand.

Eagerly the monk watched the doomed horsemen who sought to escape. The riders could scarcely be

descried, but he knew that they were spurring their horses to the utmost, led on by a single knight, who was well in advance of his troop.

"They will escape those on this side," muttered the onlooker, "but they do not yet see those beyond."

Then, after a pause:

"There — said I not so? Those on this side have given up the chase. The royalists have reached the road. Ah! Seigneur!"

This exclamation marked the foreseen catastrophe. The escaping squadron had dashed across the road and burst unexpectedly upon the larger force, which had been moving up the road on the westward side.

In the distance the monk could see the pursued party scatter fanwise, all making for the still distant river. All but the leader, who dashed madly at the attacking troop, evidently bent upon so engaging their attention as to prevent capture of the others.

The attempt proved successful, apparently. For, after a commotion rendered strangely petty to witness by the silence and the distance, the attacking party turned eastward, leaving the others to make good their escape, but bringing with them the intrepid leader, a prisoner of war.

Turning from the campagna, Father Vincent, for

he it was, gazed earnestly down between the sloping roofs of the city, as though seeking some one in the darkness of the narrow street.

While he was standing thus, a man's figure emerged from the watch-tower near at hand. The bearing and costume betrayed some small shopkeeper of the town.

He advanced a few steps, and then, seeing the black frock and cowl, stood still and coughed slightly.

The monk turned, and then stepped forward eagerly, to confront the silent figure standing black against the northern sky.

"At last, Barletto!" he exclaimed, in evident relief. "How long you have been! Have you brought the promised news?"

The burgher pointed with his thumb to the watch-tower.

"It's there," he replied. "Will you see it?"

"See it? See what?"

"The fellow I've found. He can tell you what you want to know."

"Bring him here, then. Why have you left him behind?"

Barletto grinned, and, without other movement, thrust forward an open palm.

The monk understood, and placed a number of coins in the burgher's hand.

"Now — keep your promise."

Barletto entered the tower, and in a few seconds reappeared, followed by a tall, youthful figure clad in hose of black and yellow stripes surmounted by a shabby red jacket with hanging sleeves. In his hand he twirled a greasy skull-cap from which floated a feather much the worse for wear.

"This is Caloche," was Barletto's introduction.

The young man advanced with an easy swagger, while the monk eyed him carefully in the waning light.

"At your service, father," Caloche announced.

"So you know the Sieur de Bersier?" the monk said, abruptly.

"Hm — that — perhaps," said the youth, drily.

"What!" exclaimed the monk, angrily, turning to Barletto. "Have you played me false, perchance?"

"Tut, tut, Caloche!" said the burgher. "The money is here. Tell Father Vincent all he asks," and he chinked the coins in his closed hand.

With a comical bow, Caloche acknowledged receipt of this information, and then, turning to Father Vincent, —

"I know him very well, your Reverence. The

young Captain Cavriana is his bosom friend, and I had the honour to serve the captain."

"Dismissed, I suppose? How long ago?"

"Well — I will admit that, when my zeal became too great, my master rewarded me with a furlough — only a furlough, you understand."

"And this zeal took the form — "

"Why, to tell the truth, I respected my master's privacy too much. I could not bear to leave his tent-flap unguarded, for fear of impudent eavesdroppers."

"And so you stopped the gap with your own ear?" The monk smiled.

"Your Reverence has said it."

"Now to the point. Barletto tells me you have the secret of the winged helmet."

"Which I gained, as it happens, by that very zeal which your Reverence has so justly commended."

"Commended!"

Father Vincent chuckled. This impudence was really amusing.

Then he said, gravely:

"Since you possess this secret, young man, and I have paid for it, I beg you will deliver my purchase at once. Whose crest is the winged helmet?"

"No one's."

"No one's?" said the monk, angrily.

"Just so, father."

"Then you — you —"

"Save your rage, your Reverence," said the youth, calmly, and with a graceful gesture of the hand. "The winged helmet is no one's crest — believe me — but it is a secret love sign —"

"Ah!"

"Yes; a sort of talisman associated with a young lady left behind in France — in some convent, I believe. She puts it on her letters — on her handkerchiefs and other love-tokens — and he — well, he worships it as a sign of her."

"No wonder inquiry was useless among the heralds!" muttered the priest. Then, "Where is De Bersier?" he asked.

Caloche pointed westward.

"With Francis, before Pavia," he replied.

"And what are his habits? Who are his principal associates?"

Barletto stepped forward hastily with extended hand.

"*Halte là!*" he exclaimed. "The diligence goes no farther on this track, father, until a further fare has been paid. Caloche is no treatise on history to be bought for a piece of gold and put into one's pocket!"

The discharged valet laughed aloud.

The monk smiled scornfully.

"Good!" he said. "You may go."

He had learned what he had waited two years to know. The rest was immaterial.

Barletto said nothing, but led the way back to the tower. Caloche stopped to make an elaborate and sarcastic bow. Then he, too, turned his back and quickly followed his friend.

Father Vincent waited until he had seen his informants disappear in a drinking-house below, and then entered the tower himself.

Descending the spiral stone stairs, he turned over in his mind the information he had just received. So — it was no other than De Bersier himself who had dropped the embroidered handkerchief in the secret passage!

Father Vincent was pleased, for the possible complication of a second lover — a bold young noble, whose crest was a winged helmet — had long disturbed him.

Now the situation was much simplified. He had determined to wreak vengeance both upon Du Beaulieu and the family of De Bersier. Against the former because of the still mysterious disappearance of De Pompelac. Against De Bersier because this monk had taken upon himself the feud of his master.

This double vengeance he thought he could now accomplish. Could he connect De Bersier with the winged helmet in Du Beaulieu's mind, and at the same time conceal the fact that he was indeed De·Bersier and, therefore, the count's brother-in-law? This done, little skill would be needed to make Du Beaulieu slay the innocent youth in the sudden rage of discovery. Then what an easy triumph lay at hand when Du Beaulieu learned who it was he had killed!

The principal obstacle to this plan lay in the two men being in opposite camps. But the monk counted upon the fortunes of war to aid him in bringing them together.

Deep in these thoughts, slowly forming his plans, the priest passed through the city gate and walked with bowed head between the rows of tents. Reaching a large tent, before which was displayed a banner bearing a hound's head, he turned to the right and entered a smaller shelter reared beside it. This was a private tent, provided by the Count du Beaulieu for his confessor.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE NAMELESS KNIGHT

THE Count du Beaulieu dined that night with Von Frundsberg.

The immense tent was bright with torches and candles, whose reeking smoke hung hot in the angles of the canvas overhead.

Upon a long plank table, set upon movable supports, were placed the abundant viands, worthy of a Gargantuan feast.

Here were great rounds of half-cooked meat, heaps of roast fowl, huge pasties from whose broken crusts arose clouds of steam; rows of flagons, some of glass, some of earthenware, containing wines of every conceivable vintage, — Italian, French, Rhenish. Delicate Italian loaves from the city near at hand were heaped profusely at intervals, and richly wrought candelabra stood among this miscellaneous assortment of food and drink, illuminating, with ironic brilliance, the uncouth contrasts on every hand.

Nor were the manners of the guests superior to the taste and sense of order displayed in the table settings.

Coarse-featured Germans, these, in whom gluttony replaced epicurean pleasure; quantity being all in all. Little recked they of uncertain digestion.

Here sat Von Boehm, a Rhenish captain, sprawling on the long wooden bench, his elbows on the table, stuffing great masses of thick pastry into his immense mouth. While he ate, he laughed at the broad jests of his neighbour, in whose glistening face shone eyes bloodshot with much drink.

On the opposite side was Von Krell, the herculean Suabian. With drunken gravity, he was twisting his brass helmet into a drinking-cup with his unaided hands, and at last, amid the admiring cries of his companions, he filled it with ale, and quaffed the contents to the health of a common woman of the town.

Farther up sat the Graf von Walsenberg, tearing a fowl into shreds with his teeth; stripping the bones, which he threw over his shoulder to the masterless town dogs which had gathered in the tent.

Next to Von Walsenberg sat young Hugo von Salzheim, the famous runner, his brawny chest bare, his young skin still pink and white despite his

gluttonous excesses. He cried "prosit," as he dashed a silver tankard against a like vessel in the hand of his neighbour, and the two, tossing off their liquor, held their cups inverted at arm's length over the table.

They all talked together, these animal men, trained for hand-to-hand conflict, each a leader of brutes yet lower. Their soldiers stood behind them, grinning at their jests, now and again serving their masters. Plate armour had been laid aside, and in the two rows of guests only leather jerkins, covered in some cases by chain armour, might be seen. The night was hot and still, and garments hung open on the hairy chests, sleeves rolled up exposed splendid arms not too clean, glistening with sweat.

Suddenly there was a loud shout.

"*Achtung, herrn!*"

There was instant silence, and every eye was turned toward the head of the table.

He who had called for attention was their host, Graf Georg von Frundsberg. He was standing before his chair, a mighty beaker in his hand, his fierce eyes sweeping the two lines of warriors at his table.

A notable figure he, even in those days of great heroes and great rascals. A giant among a race of giants, he might have typified Woden himself

in his colossal power, but for the too evident obesity and the plainly visible flabbiness of the flesh on his bull neck.

His face was a mask of Bacchus moulded to fit the Teutonic type, and bearded with iron gray, the ends of his moustache hanging almost to his collar-bone. Purple cheeks, finely veined with scarlet, would have hidden his deep-set bloodshot eyes but for their fierce sparkle, not dimmed even in his cups. The bulbous nose, as purple as his cheeks, would have excited laughter had not the high aquiline ridge warned the scoffer to beware.

Alone of all the company, he still wore his plate armour, with a protruding arch of steel over his chest and scale-like plates on his shoulders and upper arms. His legs were encased in plum-coloured tights, thrust into yellow boots. A skirt of jointed steel plates was fastened about his waist, being divided into two sections over the thighs, joined by an arch exposing the massive loins.

A mighty weapon, all of steel, stood with its point upon the floor, its hilt in his hand. It was a great two-handed sword, and was as long above the cross-guard as its owner's thigh. The two-edged blade itself was nearly five feet in length.

Upon the floor by his side stood his casque, a quaint head-gear shaped like a modern jockey's cap

set upon a widow's hood, all of steel and devoid of adornment.

Indeed, the only ornament upon his person was a long chain composed of massive links of fine gold. This encircled his waist, the knotted ends hanging at his side.

Such, in outward appearance, was the giver of this feast as he stood to toast his guest.

"My valiant friends," he cried, raising his beaker high, "I drink with you the health of our guest — the friend of the Prince of Bourbon. To the Count du Beaulieu — Hoch!"

"Hoch! hoch! hoch!"

The cry arose on every side, and then silence as each emptied his cup, and the prince of drinkers at their head disposed of enough Rhenish to have filled two bottles of the pigmy modern type.

Von Frundsberg seated himself, and his attendants filled his beaker.

Then arose the guest of honour to acknowledge the toast. He sat upon his host's right hand, and, as he stood, he turned to face those below him at the table.

But stay! Can this be Armand du Beaulieu, the model of French knighthood? What a thing is contrast! Beside the giant brute at his left, the French nobleman looked almost like a stripling. And yet,

among his fellows he was reckoned a splendid warrior, Du Beaulieu. Nor is it unlikely that in single combat he could have overcome the bloated Von Frundsberg.

Just now, however, social amenities were in order. Du Beaulieu was here at Bourbon's request and as his master's representative.

Upon Von Frundsberg and his followers depended all of Bourbon's lofty plans. They were gluttons, brutes, unclean barbarians — yes. But Bourbon was only the nominal chieftain in the imperial camp. Lannoy and Pescara hated him. Upon his Suabians and Burgundians, then, he must rely for support, and it behoved him to keep their goodwill at all hazards.

Du Beaulieu knew this, and, despite the disgust these men inspired, he strove to flatter them with winning words. He hated his task with all his soul — but he was working in his prince's name.

"My lords and my good friends!" he began. "Your hearty welcome, your heartier fare, and your most hearty toast do me too much honour. I accept them, not for myself, but knowing them to be meant for him in whose name I have come among you. I refer to Charles, Duke of Bourbon and Auvergne and — "

He was interrupted by cries of applause and the blows of cups and dagger-hilts upon the table.

"May I not add — soon to be King of Aquitaine!"

Amid increased acclamations, Von Frundsberg arose excitedly and shouted in tones that bore down all other sounds:

"Say King of Rome as well!"

The guests arose at this with a very thunder of approbation, some mounting their chairs, and two or three planting one foot upon the table.

"Hail, Bourbon! King of Rome!" they shouted. "Death to the Pope! On to Rome!"

Von Frundsberg sank back in his chair with a wicked smile.

"Yes, yes," he muttered, "we'll hang the accursed antichrist yet!" and he swung the ends of his famous gold chain, — the chain with which he openly boasted that he would strangle the Pope.

A frown contracted Du Beaulieu's brows, but quickly passed away. He heartily wished that Bourbon had chosen some less outspoken representative than himself.

When silence had been restored, the Frenchman brought his address to a speedy end. He felt that he could not continue long without making felt his Catholic hatred for these Lutherans and their im-

pious designs. He did not know that it was Bourbon's promise to lead his army against Rome, when he had conquered Francis, which had induced these Protestant fanatics to leave their homes.

The count's speech closed amid perfunctory applause, and at once there rose to his feet Otto von Odenwaldt, deep in his cups and full of his favourite theme.

"*Herrn!*" he cried, leaning over the table and slowly sweeping the line opposite him with his eyes. "We are all drunk — splendidly drunk."

"No — not yet — not yet."

So cried many. Others merely laughed.

"I say we are all drunk!" the speaker persisted. "And now the time has come to play!"

At this moment his glance reached the French nobleman near the head of the table, and his eyes lighted up with cupidity as he noted the splendid gold chain Du Beaulieu had donned to do honour to his host.

"My good friend!" he shouted, thickly — "Sir Frenchman! I will play with you — be it with dice or cards — Your gold chain against my Spanish helmet."

Du Beaulieu flushed to the roots of his hair. Before he could reply, Von Frundsberg brought his huge fist down upon the table.

"Sit down!" he roared.

Compelled by his chief's terrible glance, Von Odenwaldt slowly sank on to the bench.

Then up leaped Von Salzheim, the lusty runner, a favourite with their host.

"My lords!" he cried, "Von Odenwaldt is to be praised for his effort to entertain us; but I can suggest a better plan for his consideration. I hear he made a prisoner this afternoon. Why not have him brought in to while the time away?"

"Good! Good! The prisoner! The prisoner!" cried the guests in unison; and Von Odenwaldt, rising once more, bowed with drunken gravity to right and left.

"My lords!" he exclaimed, "you shall have your wish. You must know that this evening, as I rode back with my men from a reconnoissance near Sant' Angelo, we fell in with a party of King Francis' horse. We scattered the puny creatures and captured their captain. By the fist of Friar Luther, I doubt if the little fellow be a man. I much fear 'tis a lass with its smooth face and lithe limbs. Alack! Don't tell my good lady at home if it turns out a woman!"

Amid the loud laughter evoked by this sally, Von Odenwaldt turned and gave an order to his attendant who immediately left the tent.

In a short time, he returned with a comrade. Between them the two soldiers were leading a young knight. He had laid off his armour and was bareheaded. They had found him sleeping fully dressed, and he blinked in the bright light, still scarcely awake.

Du Beaulieu frowned as he saw that this youth was evidently a French nobleman. The type was unmistakable, although the costume betrayed nothing of the young man's rank.

There was a momentary silence as the prisoner was led in.

Von Frundsberg was the first to speak.

"Give the lad a stoup of Rhenish," he commanded, and then to the man at his shoulder he said: "Put brandy in my cup, this light wine is so much water."

Both commands were instantly obeyed.

The prisoner took the wine and, after a courteous bow, taking in the whole company, he drank moderately and returned the cup, still half full, to the soldier beside him. The fellow grinned contemptuously and emptied the cup at a draught.

Von Odenwaldt was on his feet again. The success of his former jest had delighted him, and he followed the line of thought with a drunkard's persistence.

"My lords!" he cried, "you see what a scandal I have brought upon myself. This prisoner is certainly a girl. She dare not drink wine, pretty thing!"

Then, heedless of the angry flush upon his captive's face, he opened his arms wide, crying:

"Come, little one— Come, give me a chaste salute."

Amid the roar of drunken laughter that greeted this remark, the prisoner, now very pale, stood still, awaiting silence. Then, as the laughter fell, he called in a clear voice for another cup of wine.

"Ho! ho!" cried Frundsberg, "he's going to prove you a liar, Otto. Carry this to him," and the leader, filling his immense beaker to the brim with pure brandy, handed it to his attendant.

The young prisoner advanced to meet the cup until he reached the side of his captor, where he took it in both hands.

"Pure brandy!" he exclaimed. "Fit bath for a coward and a sot!"

And then, with a quick fling, he threw the whole of the spirit into the face and eyes of Von Odenwaldt.

Instantly there was an uproar, amid which the young man heard a single voice cry out in French:

"Well done!"

Von Odenwaldt, gasping for breath, rubbed his fists madly into his eyes to clear them of the fiery liquid, and then stumbled forward, raging, to grasp his captive. But two others restrained the drunken brute, while, in obedience to an order from Von Frundsberg, two soldiers led the young man before their chief commander.

The Suabian chieftain was on his feet, and behind him the prisoner could discern a sober guest of refined aspect, who was evidently a Frenchman.

The young man was still trembling with rage, while the gigantic German seemed rather amused than vexed at what had passed.

"Come, come!" he cried. "Thou hast spirit, my bantam cock. What is thy name?"

The prisoner repressed his choler as best he could, and replied civilly:

"I am glad I have your knightly approval, my lord."

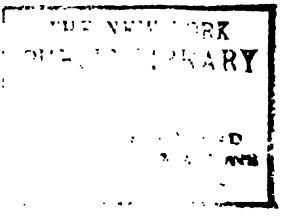
"Courage is always good to see, boy. Give us thy name. I've asked thee twice."

"I crave pardon," was the reply, "but I am under a vow. I must beg to be excused."

"A vow, eh?" said the German, with a grin. "And by what did you swear, pray?"

"I am bound by a solemn oath in the name of

"LIFTED THE YOUNG MAN FROM HIS FEET"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Our Lady of Consolation. Until I am released, I must remain unknown."

At the mention of the Virgin, two or three of the guests laughed.

"Our Lady, eh?" sneered Von Frundsberg, seating himself. "And what lady is that, pray?"

"I forgot that you were a protestant," said the prisoner. "Have you never heard of the Blessed Mother of God?" and the young man crossed himself.

"Mother of God!" roared the Lutheran, moved to fanatical fury. "You puling slave of antichrist, do you dare face me — me — Georg von Frundsberg, with blasphemies and papist vows?"

Pale with renewed anger, the prisoner retorted:

"Beware how you set your tongue to abuse of our mother the Church, Graf von Frundsberg. Beware how you revile the Queen of Heaven."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the German, contemptuously, "Queen of Heaven, indeed! Queen of Babylon! Mother of harlots!"

Like lightning the prisoner leaped forward and struck Von Frundsberg full upon the mouth.

Before another could speak or lift a hand, the Suabian had lifted the young man from his feet, and, raising him high above his head, had dashed him half-way down the length of the table, sweep-

ing it clear of everything, — food, lights, and vessels.

Then, amid pandemonium, he stood staring straight before him, his little eyes aflame, seeming to protrude beyond his cheeks, foam on his lips, and his coarse hair standing like bristles on his forehead.

A score of eager hands were stretched toward the youth, lying prostrate and stunned upon the table, but quicker than all was the dash of a dark form which leaped upon the table, and, standing over the captive, swept a circle clear around him with a sword.

It was Du Beaulieu.

"Fair play!" he shouted. "Fair play, my lords. This is a brave man and a nobleman —"

"He is my prisoner!"

It was Von Odenwaldt who spoke.

"And for that reason you should treat him with consideration. You have no right to ill-treat and abuse a prisoner of war."

Von Odenwaldt, now almost overcome with drink, reclined impudently on his chair.

"I'll kill him if I please!" he growled.

Du Beaulieu turned to Von Frundsberg.

"My lord," he said, "I appeal to your chivalry. What you have done to this prisoner you did in

wrath. The provocation was ample justification. But you will not let this thing go further."

Von Frundsberg, now a little ashamed of his attack upon a defenceless captive, sank back in his chair.

"He is not my prisoner," he replied.

"You are master here," was the rejoinder. "In my princely master's name, I beg you to forbid the persecution of a prisoner of war, — of a French nobleman."

"Let Bourbon refrain from interference, my lord," said Von Frundsberg, sullenly.

"Who says he is a nobleman?" some one cried.

This suggestion was taken up with alacrity.

"Yes, yes! Good! Let him prove it! He will not give his name!"

"But he is senseless!" cried Du Beaulieu, in despair.

He well knew the sacred quality of those romantic vows so often undertaken by young knights, and he realized that this prisoner would maintain his incognito in spite of any pressure.

"We'll bring him to his senses! Give us the prisoner!"

The Frenchman looked fiercely about and saw how, with weapons drawn, the Germans were closing in upon him. Gladly would he have fought out

this quarrel, even against such hopeless odds. But he realized that, as Bourbon's representative, he could not attack his master's allies. After all, the captive was theirs, and, while chivalry forbade ill treatment of a prisoner of war, it gave no man the power to prevent another not under his command from irregular conduct in this particular.

There was but one chance for the prisoner. If Bourbon could be found, and his personal intervention secured, all might be well. While these Germans were bringing the young man to consciousness, he would have time to find the prince.

Leaping from the table, Du Beaulieu ran swiftly into the open air.

By the door he found Le Ferrailleur, who was throwing dice upon a drum-head with two or three German soldiers.

"Albert," said the count, "stand within the door and report to me when I return what has happened."

The soldier obeyed at once, and his master hurried away to find the commander-in-chief.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN APPEAL TO BOURBON

UNFORTUNATELY, Bourbon was not in his tent. He had gone to inspect a part of the camp with the Marquis of Pescara, the attendants said.

Hurrying after the constable, Du Beaulieu reached Pescara's tent, only to learn that Bourbon had returned to his own quarters by another way.

All this seeking took time, and when Du Beaulieu had again reached his general's quarters, and had found him alone, he was much excited at thought of what was possibly passing in Von Frundsberg's tent.

Full of chivalric indignation, and with bitter contempt for these German barbarians, Du Beaulieu told the duke what had happened.

When he had finished, the prince lay pensive, his splendid frame extended at full length upon his couch, drawing his fingers restlessly through his long black beard.

"What would you have me do?" he asked at length, raising his large dark eyes to his friend's face.

"Do!" cried Du Beaulieu, hotly. "If you had seen what I saw, monseigneur, you would not ask. You are the superior of this infidel German beast. I ask you to exert your supreme authority to ensure the ordinary usages of war. To prevent a stain, — a black stain upon the chivalry of your army."

Rising and sitting upon the edge of his couch, Bourbon leaned forward and clasped his hands between his knees.

"The young man struck Von Frundsberg in the face, you say."

"But the German blasphemed against our holy Church. The youth — "

"I know," interrupted the prince, "but a blow is a blow. Do you think Von Frundsberg will listen to me?"

"If you command, how can he refuse, monseigneur?"

Bourbon smiled sadly.

"Alas! Count von Frundsberg is not my vassal. If he refuses — "

A commotion at the entrance to the tent caused both men to lift their heads. A soldier entered and stood at attention.

"Well, Jacques, what is it?" said the prince.

"Monseigneur, a soldier says he must speak at once with the Count du Beaulieu. He says his name is Le Ferrailleur."

"Admit him at once."

A moment later, Albert, pale and breathless, burst in. He stood perplexed and awed by the presence of the prince.

"Speak, my man," said Bourbon. "We are anxious for your news."

"Oh, my lord!" cried Le Ferrailleur, turning to Du Beaulieu, "they are torturing the prisoner!"

"What!" the two nobles cried out together.

"Yes; they brought back his senses with brandy and cold douches. Then his captor commanded him to tell his name. He refused, pleading his knightly vow. They warned him that, unless he were of noble birth, they would flog him to death for insulting their leader. He swore that he was noble, but would not give his name. They were not satisfied, but began to strip him, shouting for cords and a whip. When I saw this, I left and ran hither as fast as I could."

Du Beaulieu turned triumphantly to the prince.

"Monseigneur, you see! They would flog him. Flog a Frenchman — a nobleman!"

To the count's amazement, Bourbon turned and began pacing the floor in the utmost perplexity.

"Monseigneur!" cried the count, "why do you hesitate? Perhaps at this moment those brutes have applied a whip to the back of a French gentleman. That whip will fall upon the whole chivalry of France, monseigneur. It will fall upon my back — upon yours!"

Bourbon stopped suddenly, and cried half in passion, half in despair:

"What can I do? Consider, count! What can I do?"

"Do? Why, stop it! You are the representative of the Emperor Charles V. Your command will be sufficient. Why do you hesitate?"

"Because, unless this captive can prove himself a noble, he cannot claim more than a peasant's fate. How can I compel Von Frundsberg? How can I prove what the prisoner himself conceals?"

"By the plain facts, monseigneur. This prisoner was captured leading a squadron of reconnoissance. Are peasants entrusted with the command of cavalry? Oh, come quickly, monseigneur. We are already too late!"

Bourbon shut his teeth and stood rigidly, as he answered:

"It is impossible, count. Listen! Without the

German allies, whom I myself raised, and who are paid by my cousin of Savoy, I am powerless. My commission from the emperor is merely nominal. Pescara, Del Vasto, Lannoy, — all are against me. Oh, I have learned my lesson at the siege of Marseilles. With the prey in my hand, the envious Spaniards defied me, refused to obey me, and the Spanish monarch who made me their chief — he who promised me so much before I renounced my king! Charles V., I say — repudiated me.

"This time I have an army of my own. These Germans I must play against the treacherous Spaniards. Francis is in my grasp. I shall capture him as surely as I am the most injured prince in Christendom! And then I shall be King of Aquitaine and of the Bourbonnais. Now what do you ask? That I renounce all this for which I have spent my all, — without which I become proscribed, a hunted man, — all this for the safety of a captive who refuses to give his name. Count, you see this is impossible."

The prince ended in a tone of appeal, but Du Beaulieu stood unchanged.

"Monseigneur, it is for chivalry and for the Church. It is for the dignity of Bourbon and for mercy. You, — my chief, my prince, — oh, you will not refuse! You cannot fear for doing what

alone is right. A Bourbon cannot retire before a Frundsberg!" He spoke the last hated name with the profoundest loathing.

Bourbon for a moment seemed to waver. Then he suddenly turned his back and cried:

"Impossible! No, count, I cannot. It would be ruin."

For a few seconds, Du Beaulieu stood transfixed, apparently overwhelmed at his master's pettiness. Then there came into his face that set look of stony anger, and he seemed to grow in dignity and stature.

"Then it is farewell, monseigneur," he broke out.

Bourbon turned swiftly and gazed at his vassal in astonishment and sorrowful reproach. But the count proceeded with growing animation.

"Yes, for I, too, have my knightly vow to keep. I will follow no lord who fears a Von Frundsberg!"

"Count!"

"Prince! I know what I do. When you renounced your allegiance to Francis the First, I followed you, for I was your vassal, and I saw the injustice which drove you from a king who knew not his duty. Alas! I now see that I was wrong! Only disaster has followed my resolution.

I bore it because I believed you a true knight and a true son of the Church — "

"Count! Count! Beware how you speak!"

"I have little more to say. I must act. Chivalry calls me. You fear your subordinate, — this German beast! Well, I will support my order, and prevent or avenge the frightful degradation which threatens a knight and a Frenchman. Duke de Bourbon, adieu! I renounce my allegiance now and for ever!"

At the next moment Du Beaulieu was gone, followed by Le Ferrailleur.

Bourbon took three steps in pursuit and stopped. Then shrugging his shoulders, he returned and fell into a chair. Folding his arms upon his table, he gazed into vacancy, lost in thought. Did he foresee the coming years? Did he realize that he had already begun the decline which ended in his sudden death on the walls of the Eternal City?

With rapid strides, closely followed by Le Ferrailleur, Du Beaulieu hurried toward Von Frundsberg's tent. He had made up his mind to fight single-handed for the young knight's freedom if need be; but first to attempt an expedient which had just presented itself to him.

Without a moment's hesitation, he dashed aside

the door-flap, ignoring the guards, and stood for an instant surveying the interior of the tent.

The table had been pushed up against one wall, and upon it was set a stool on which they had placed the young captive, stripped to the waist.

The German captains stood in a compact group before the table, all save Von Krell and Von Frundsberg himself. The latter, sprawling half in a great armchair, half on the floor, was insensible with drink.

As for Von Krell, he stood on the table behind the victim, upon whom he was inflicting the torture of the cord.

Around the bare chest and upper arms of the prisoner a strong, thin rope had been tightly secured. Between the cord and the back a long rod had been slipped. By turning this lever in the hands, the rope was twisted and, slowly tightening, forced its way into the victim's flesh.

The breathless onlookers viewed the scene in silence, completely sobered by their intense interest in this trial of strength.

As Du Beaulieu entered, Von Krell had paused to repeat his question.

"Prisoner," he was saying, "tell your name. If you are noble, you will receive the treatment due your rank. Once more — your name."

With teeth tight clenched and eyes shut, the brave youth answered nothing, but his lips moved silently.

Von Krell stepped back, and, with his powerful arm, twisted the rod through a half-circle. The tightening of the cord could be seen on the chest and shoulders. The prisoner half-sobbed, half-gasped with the intense agony. His arms below where the cord had cut into the flesh were turning blue.

Horrible as was this scene to one who, like Du Beaulieu, had no vein of cruelty in his nature, he yet sighed in relief when he saw that the flogging had been abandoned. The whip meant dishonour; it was only for brutes and peasants.

The count's eyes swept quickly over the assembled group. Finally they rested upon Von Odenwaldt, and Du Beaulieu approached his man with rapid steps.

Touching the German on the shoulder, he beckoned him aside:

"My lord," he said, striving to hide his loathing, "you offered this evening to play your inlaid casque against this gold chain, I believe?"

"Yes. What then?"

"Why, this: the chain is of eighteen carats and

weighs forty ounces. I will give it to you for yonder captive."

Von Odenwaldt looked first at his prisoner and then back at the chain.

"Let me lift it," he said.

With nervous haste, the count slipped off the chain and placed it in the German's eager hands.

Von Krell was once more repeating his question. In another moment the rod would be given another twist.

"Quick, my lord! Is it a bargain?"

The magnetic intensity of the Frenchman's manner seemed coercive upon the other man.

"Yes, the prisoner is yours."

Von Krell was just stepping behind the stool and was grasping the rod when Du Beaulieu broke through the crowd of ruffians, and, leaping upon the table, placed the point of his sword at the executioner's throat.

"Hands up, quick! That man is my prisoner!"

Von Krell shrank back, and the count turned swiftly toward the others, who were snarling viciously and drawing their weapons.

"Gentlemen!" he said, peremptorily, "this prisoner is mine. I have bought him, as my lord Von Odenwaldt will tell you."

As they turned to their comrade, who corrobo-

rated what they had heard, Du Beaulieu cut the cord with his sword and caught the prisoner in his arms.

The young man had fainted.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FATHER VINCENT'S BENEVOLENCE

BETWEEN two rows of armed men, who fell back on either hand to make way for him, Du Beaulieu strode to the door, the half-naked prisoner flung fainting over his saviour's shoulder.

"Bring the gentleman's garments, Albert," he said, and, without farewell to the others, left the tent.

Le Ferrailleur gathered up the shirt and tunic which had been roughly taken from the prisoner before applying the cord.

He glanced around to right and left to make sure that he had forgotten nothing, and stooped to pick up a note which fell from a pocket in the tunic. Then he followed his master.

The count was met at the door of his tent by Father Vincent, who appeared no whit surprised at his unusual burden.

"I was awaiting you, my son," he said, quietly.

"See," and he pointed to the lint and one or two bottles of simple drugs which stood beside the count's bed.

Du Beaulieu was not surprised. Ignorant of the monk's genius for espionage, he saw in this prevision another instance of his chaplain's occult science.

"You have done well," he said. "A priest is the fittest leech in this case, for the lad has suffered for his faith."

He laid his burden upon the narrow camp bed, and stood for a moment gazing with indignant pity upon the cruel cuts in the white skin, made by the cord. A certain diffidence forbade display of feeling, however, and prompted him to pretend an indifference which was far from his nature.

"Father," he said, "I leave my tent and my prisoner to you. With your permission I will take your tent. I must watch late to-night, and, were I here, I would disturb the young cavalier's repose."

The priest bowed silent assent, and kneeled to dress the worst of the wounds.

"Le Ferrailleur, you will attend Father Vincent."

The soldier bowed and stepped back to let his master pass out into the night.

Albert's eyes watched the monk with admiration, as, with swift, gentle movements, he washed the

skin, applied an emollient, and skilfully wound and fastened the bandages.

He had never forgiven this strange monk for usurping Father Paul's place, but he had several times had to acknowledge during the past two years of campaigning that the new chaplain was a better leech than his predecessor.

At length the surgeon rose to his feet and gazed a moment with satisfaction on his work. The young man still lay unconscious, the evening breeze stirring his hair. This movement caught the monk's attention.

"Let us cover him before applying restoratives," he murmured. Then, looking about, he said:

"Where are the prisoner's clothes, Albert?"

"Here, father."

He advanced and handed the two garments to the priest. Then, under his directions, he aided in slipping them upon the inanimate form.

"There!" said Father Vincent, buckling the last strap around the waist, "our patient will be warm, at least. Now to bring him to consciousness."

As he turned and reached for a bottle, his hand came in contact with Albert's arm. He looked up. Le Ferrailleur had a piece of paper in his outstretched hand.

"This letter slipped from the prisoner's coat," he said.

"Thank you. I will restore it. You may go."

Albert withdrew at once. He was sleepy, and glad enough to get to his place beside the campfire.

Father Vincent, his busy fingers unfolding the paper, watched the soldier leave. It was not his policy to neglect a single opportunity of information. This letter had no sacredness for him.

With the paper unfolded in his hand, he approached the light and read the words written upon it.

As he read, he smiled contemptuously. Finally he folded the paper with some impatience.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed. "Lover's twaddle — and unsigned."

His fingers fumbled with a wax seal as he turned back the last fold. Indifferently he glanced at the impression on the wax, and then suddenly stooped to bring it closer to his eyes and to the light. For many seconds he stood thus.

At length he raised his head.

A face radiant with an infernal light was turned first upon the unconscious patient and then cautiously to right and left.

The bent form straightened and seemed to tower

with a transport of triumph. With clenched hands he extended his arms. He opened his lips as though to shout with a mad joy, but only a sigh escaped him, and, as his arms fell to his sides, he muttered:

"At last! By a miracle!"

With almost feverish haste he applied himself to reviving his patient. As he worked with the spirits and with hand-chafing, he thought of the capture he had witnessed that evening, and wondered whether this were the leader of the squadron whose pursuit he had watched from the city wall.

At length the signs of returning consciousness became unmistakable. Father Vincent returned the letter to its owner's bosom, and then turned away, feeling the necessity of composing his features, lest they betray his excitement.

He went to the opening, and, looking forth, listened intently. All was still around the tent. Only a dog barked in a distant portion of the sleeping camp.

Through vague remains of a great dread, the prisoner's mind slowly resumed its sway. He opened his eyes to find himself lying in a strange tent, and at his side a kneeling monk, from whose dark cowl came a whispered prayer.

"Who is there?" he said, weakly.

The monk rose hurriedly, and moved the can-

delabrum so that the light fell upon the young man's face.

"Praise the saints, my son! You are not dead!"

The prisoner turned painfully upon his side.

"Dead! Nay, father, my wounds are more painful than dangerous. I recollect it all now. The coarse ruffian heretics — their threats — the cord like a burning knife —" He broke off with a shudder. Then, forcing a laugh: "It is better past than present, father!"

The monk seated himself beside his patient so that he could closely observe his face. Placing one hand on that of the prisoner, he said in a voice of gentle sympathy:

"My son, they say you suffered for our holy faith, the victim of heretic rage. Sweet is the knowledge of God's blessed martyrdom! You should be happy indeed!"

The young man shook his head and answered almost gaily, for his strength was fast returning.

"Nay, nay, good father! I can lay claim to no martyr's crown. I have but kept my knightly word. They sought to violate my vow, and I resisted them. That was all."

"Your vow was registered in heaven, and in heaven is your brave faith approved, my son. Our

blessed Lady has watched over you, and by her mercy have you been delivered."

"Ah, yes! My deliverer! What of him? A loyal knight, — a man of tender courtesy! Where has he gone? Tell me his name!"

The prisoner sat up and looked eagerly about him.

Father Vincent stretched forth his hand with a gesture of protest.

"Nay, nay, you must not become excited. Your wounds must not be fevered, my son! I have never before dressed sword-cuts so angry and yet so superficial."

"It was a cord, not the sword, father."

"The cord, the torture?"

"Yes."

"Pray tell about it. How came these heretic dogs to so exceed their rights?"

Thus questioned, the prisoner could not but explain all the circumstances of his capture and ill treatment, giving an enthusiastic account of Du Beaulieu's championship and of the manner of his rescue.

"Full nobly have you acted," said the priest when this account was completed. "Your vow was sacred. These heretics have played their souls against yours — and lost. But tell me, — if you

fear not to confide in an old man who wishes you well, — tell me what moved you to this vow. Why have you sworn to conceal your name? I feel sure that no disgraceful cause exists for this reticence."

At the mere hint of disgrace, the young man winced, and, sitting up again, he cried:

"Never, father! Never has my name been linked with disgrace! I have no cause to hide my motive, — surely not from a priest and my rescuer's confessor. It is my lady's wish. She knew of enemies who are seeking my life. After I came with the king to the war, she sent a messenger to exact from me a vow that I would disclose my name to no one who knew me not already. I took the oath at her command."

Feeling in his bosom, he drew forth the violated letter.

"See!" he continued. "Only a week ago I got this missive, reminding me of my vow. How could I break faith with my lady's gage on my breast!"

Swayed as he was by the self-conscious exaltation of artificial sentiment, the young man's tones nevertheless betrayed his deep sincerity. He had proven it, moreover, through bitter trial.

"Good!" exclaimed the priest, in deep tones of approval. "A true knight and a faithful lover! The damsel is most fortunate."

The prisoner blushed.

"Nay, father —" he began.

"Your present host will be well pleased," the monk broke in.

"Oh, tell me his name!" cried the young man, impetuously. "I had but one glimpse of him through my agony. He loomed through the mists of pain like St. Michael himself. No man, save the peerless Bayard, have I ever seen who seemed his equal in splendid dignity!"

"Tut! tut!" smiled the priest, with playful good humour, "you may not praise an old priest's penitent thus. Fie! What, to my very face, lad!" Then, as the prisoner's countenance fell: "But I'll send him to you that you may thank him — on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you reward him fitly for what he has done."

"How can I?"

"Give him your confidence. Tell him of your love. Show him your letter, even. Believe me, you will please him and do yourself a benefit."

"But, father, such a thrusting forward —"

"My son, trust my knowledge of my lord's sympathetic heart. I only ask that you answer his questions freely, and show your trust in him by

showing your lady's letter. I take it the missive gives no hint of the name you are bound to conceal."

"I will hide nothing I am not obliged to conceal, father, but I must say I cannot see —"

"Must I explain, then?" said the older man, with some severity. "Do you mistrust my motives?"

"Nay, nay, father. I have no further objection to offer."

"Then I will send my lord in at once," said the monk, rising. "And I would suggest one thing. It would perhaps be more delicate if you — being yourself forced to incognito — were not to ask your friend to give you his own name. Let him volunteer this information, I beg."

So saying, he left the tent and rapidly made his way to his own quarters, where he found the count pacing steadily back and forth, deep in thought.

"My son," he began, abruptly, "you have broken with the Prince de Bourbon. You have renounced your allegiance."

"How do you know?" exclaimed the count, stopping short.

"How do I know all that concerns you?" said the monk, solemnly.

"It is true," said Du Beaulieu.

"Have you decided where to go? what to do?"

"No; I am thinking of it."

"Then listen, I beg of you. You have rescued a chivalric youth from the hands of foul heretics. Complete your work. He is in perplexity and trouble. You can easily lend him aid. He is worthy of it. You are unattached. Will you do it?"

"What is his trouble?"

"He would not tell me, my son. But you know that I can read the soul. I tell you that your good action is incomplete. Go to this prisoner to-night and ask him bluntly his trouble. He almost worships you for your act of mercy. He will unfold his heart to you. Will you go?"

Du Beaulieu stood for awhile, irresolute. Then —

"Yes, father," he said.

The priest stepped aside and let the nobleman pass. He watched the count enter his own tent, and then silently he crept to his rear tent wall and listened.

The tents were back to back, and close behind the canvas stood the couch upon which the prisoner had been laid.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A LOVE - LETTER

As Du Beaulieu entered his tent, the prisoner, reclining on his elbow, was re-reading his letter.

His back was half-turned to the count, and his profile was visible.

The outline of the finely cut lips beneath the small, upturned moustache betrayed the tender emotions of the reader, and, as he gazed for a moment in silence upon the boyish features, the count felt his heart drawn to his guest by a sympathy he could not explain.

This scrutiny lasted but a moment, for Du Beaulieu had no intention of spying upon his guest.

"Do I intrude?" he asked.

The prisoner turned so quickly that his expression had not time to change. The count was touched to see that pain was mingled with tenderness in the young man's face.

Rising instantly, the prisoner came forward, the open letter in his hand.

"Oh, my deliverer!" he cried, "what can I say, what can I do, to repay your noble sympathy, your brave rescue!"

The count clasped the young man's hand, and smiled into the bright eyes so full of evident sincerity.

The monk, with his ear to the canvas, smiled too. In his swift imagination, he could see those two men face to face, united by a subtle bond, the source whereof he alone could tell.

He knew that they stood upon a mine whose train he had fired. He waited for the explosion with a beating heart and an evil triumph in his eyes.

"A true knight," Du Beaulieu rejoined, "claims his brother knight's protection as a right, chevalier. Will you not resume your couch?"

The prisoner shook his head with a look of wistful sadness.

"But I have given no guaranty of knighthood, my lord! Alas! even now I may not give my name to him who has saved my life!"

"Nor do I ask it, monsieur," said the count, gently leading his guest to a stool beside the camp table.

The two men seated themselves on opposite sides of the candles. Then the prisoner became conscious of the letter he was carrying. He remembered the monk's words, and they fell in with his own desire to explain to his saviour his apparent discourtesy.

"My lord," he began, shyly, "I submit that a knight may not break his word to his lady, — above all, when confirmed by a solemn vow."

"Assuredly not," said Du Beaulieu, gravely.

"This word — this vow — have held and still hold my lips sealed where my name is concerned. See! Here in my hand is a letter I have lately received from her in whose keeping lies my knightly honour. Suffer me to read an extract from her message. She says: 'I cannot refrain from reminding you of your vow of incognito. I am well advised that you have a new enemy. Trust no stranger with your name. Remember, you have sworn by Our Lady. I am the more urgent, that this may be my last message for many weeks. Alas! that you should be away —'"

The reader broke off.

"The rest," he said, "touches other matters, my lord."

Du Beaulieu thought of Father Vincent's words, and saw in the sentence thus sharply interrupted the possible key to his guest's trouble.

"Chevalier," he said, "I was fully persuaded from the first of your noble birth. But, if you feel indeed under obligation to me, I beg you will not hide any cause of anxiety which your lady's letter may contain. If I can aid you, believe me, it will be my greatest pleasure."

The young man glanced gratefully at his host and replied:

"My lord, I cannot refuse. The letter continues thus: 'Alas! that you should be away at this moment. The bishop is about to direct my removal from St. Cecilia —'"

"St. Cecilia!"

"My lady is confined in the convent of St. Cecilia, my lord, in the diocese of the Bishop of Parsy."

"Strange!" muttered the count. Then in a louder tone:

"Pardon the interruption, I beg. Pray go on."

"'To move me from St. Cecilia — I know not whither. Oh, that I dared pray for your return! What if we should be parted, my own — my knight — parted beyond recall — parted for ever! I try to pray for strength to bear it, but I can only hunger for your loving presence, only —' Forgive me, my lord!"

Throwing the letter upon the table, the young

"THE LETTER WAS SEALED WITH A WINGED HELMET"

man turned away and paced up and down at the rear end of the tent, seeking to control the flood of sweet and bitter passions these words evoked.

Du Beaulieu followed him for a moment with his eyes, and then glanced mechanically at the missive beside him.

The crisp paper had bent inward jealously upon its creases, as though consciously enfolding its owner's secret. Fate turned the sealed flap uppermost, and the coloured wax caught Du Beaulieu's eye.

What was this!

Swiftly he stooped and examined it more closely. His eyes grew wide with amazement and horror as the impression told him its story.

The letter was sealed with a winged helmet.

In every detail it resembled the embroidery upon the handkerchief that had been found in the secret passage at Beaulieu Castle.

Hungrily the plotting monk strained his sense in the vain effort to know what had happened. There was a silence that seemed endless, broken only by the monotonous pacing to and fro of the prisoner.

Had the count seen that fatal seal?

If so, why did he not act?

As the seconds grew into minutes, the listener's

suspense grew intolerable. What was it? In God's name, what had happened?

Suddenly a shadow moved swiftly across the wall of the priest's tent.

He had just time to throw himself upon his knees as though praying by his cot, when there appeared in the open door the martial figure of the count. His face was invisible in the darkness.

"Come!" he said, in a low, hoarse voice.

He had seen it, then!

The monk looked up in feigned surprise.

"Come with me!" the count repeated.

There was a potency of command in the quick, tense words that the monk could not resist. He knew not why, but, as he approached the soldier, his heart beat wildly, and he trembled as though with a chill.

The count rapidly led the way past the sleeping tents and out into an open field. The monk followed, terrified yet overjoyed.

Then there came a momentary fear that the count knew all — he feared that he was himself unmasked by fate. But this he would not believe, and so he followed steadily, until they stopped together beneath a solitary tree.

Here the count faced about and, after one in-

voluntary glance at his face, the monk dropped his eyes.

"Found!" the count half-whispered. "You were right. Here — here in the war I have found him! You were right!"

The monk dared not speak, but waited, his energetic nature paralyzed by the nobleman's rage.

"Conceive it — he — This young knight! O God — in whom is faith?"

He ground his heel into the earth.

"This noble, pious, faithful martyr! This smooth-faced, gentle, puling, lying varlet! He is the —"

He broke off, and his manner changed. Leaning against the tree, he laughed with hysterical abandon.

"Think of it! For him I defied my prince! My hand saved him from torture and death. Think of it — oh, wise protector of Catholic youth! What think you was his trouble, eh? What heartfelt sorrow did you bid me assuage in this protégé of mine?"

He stopped again, unable to command and express the confusion of his thoughts. When he spoke again, a very mockery of laughter broke his utterance.

"Adultery — adultery — and still — still adul-

tery! This was the young man's ailment. A longing lust for another man's wife. And that wife — mine! Mine, ha, ha! D'ye hear? My lady!"

The priest could not repress an exclamation of genuine horror to hear this man thus fling his wife's disgrace in the wind between two bursts of laughter.

Du Beaulieu heard the sound, and, with the whim of mania, he sobered suddenly.

"Tut — tut! 'Tis nought, father. Came we not hither for this? We might have guessed it surely. The accursed woman is fair to see, and pious and of noble mien and birth — The lover fits his leman, father."

"Oh, peace — peace!" cried the monk, overcome by this grim agony of madness.

"And why peace? Nay, nay, let me explain the whole. The youth has a letter. He read me some of it, wherein his precious lady adjures him to beware of a new enemy. She tells him to remember his oath and maintain his incognito. She says the bishop is about to give orders that she be moved, and she longs for his return. This pretty tale is served up with sweets, look you. She prates of his love and of her dreams. He would not read all this. But the gist of it all is here."

The count stepped forward and gripped his companion's arm till he cried out with pain.

"The letter was sealed with a winged helmet!"

Releasing the monk, Du Beaulieu waited.

"Is this all that has aroused your suspicion?" asked the monk, knowing well the answer he would get.

"Would you have more? Then here it is, — this lady of his is confined in the convent of St. Cecilia."

"Ah!"

"Is the proof complete? Do you see now who is that new enemy to be so greatly feared?"

The monk felt that it was himself that was meant, but it suited his ends that Du Beaulieu remain in his error. All had prospered with this man's plans, but he realized that even now a slip might easily bring about an understanding between these two whom he hated. So he played his game with the utmost care.

"My son," he said, after a pause carefully timed, "I am deeply thankful that, in the presence of this terrible discovery, you have held your hand from vengeance. Another might have struck blindly in his outraged wrath — "

"And I — I, you see, have left vengeance to Heaven," said the count, with terrible sarcasm.

"Oh, save your praise, for I have greater virtue even than this. I have resolved to do good for evil, father."

The priest could only stare in bewilderment.

"I have saved this man's life, and have promised to complete my work. Was it not this to which you urged me? Well, so be it. He and his mistress are pining for each other. I will bring them together. To-morrow we set out for the convent of St. Cecilia!"

"My son," faltered the priest, "what does this mean?"

"It means that I, too, have a vow. I have sworn to confront these lovers, and kill him in her presence! Oh, you may spare your breath, father. I know what you would say. Pray consider it all said. Were you to show me that hell would receive me one moment after my vengeance is satisfied, I would have my will!"

"Is there no other way?" said the monk, with well-feigned timidity.

"None," was the stern reply. "And I have brought you here, father, to give you your choice. Either pledge your sacred word that you will do my bidding, and aid my plan in all sincerity, or leave my service now, and let me carry out my will alone."

For a few moments Father Vincent pretended to hesitate. Then, with a show of frankness, he cried:

"I have followed your fortunes for two years, my son; I cannot abandon you now. Command me. I will obey."

"Good!" said the count. "I know your worth, father, and I thank you. I shall start for France in the morning, after the army departs. I dare not see this man again, lest I lose my self-control. He goes with us, of course, and to you I leave the explanation of my actions. See that he is guarded night and day, but tell his guards nothing. It is enough that he is my prisoner."

They returned to the camp together, both busy, each with his own thoughts. As they were about to part, Du Beaulieu touched his chaplain's arm.

"Father," he said, "see to it that every insignia of my name and rank is concealed. Give the strictest orders that no one speaks my name in the prisoner's presence. To make more sure, it were best that you alone converse with him during our journey. He must not know that he is in the hands of his leman's husband. He would escape me, knowing my vengeance just. This must not be."

"Fear not," said the priest, "I understand," and

then, as he watched the count's figure depart in the darkness, he muttered: "Jesu! what a power is jealousy! It teaches cunning even to the simplest!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SNARE IS BAITED

FATHER VINCENT returned at once to De Bersier, whom he found standing at the opening of Du Beaulieu's tent. The sudden, unexplained disappearance of the count had sorely perplexed him, and he greeted the monk eagerly.

"Ah, father! Is it you? Where is my protector? Have you seen him?"

"Yes. Come within. I have news for you, both good and bad."

They turned together to the table, where the candles were expiring in their sockets. The priest seated himself, and the prisoner stood expectantly before him.

"First, then," the monk began, "my lord has quarrelled with his commander."

"With Bourbon!" exclaimed the young man, in astonishment.

"Yes. My lord suddenly remembered that he was to see the duke to-night, and found himself

late to the tryst. In his consternation and confusion, he left you without warning. They met, and something passed which has caused a serious estrangement."

De Bersier's face lighted up with pleasure.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "Now may the king claim his own!"

"Not so fast, my son!" said the monk, sternly. "My master is not one to desert his feudal lord and pass over to the enemy."

The prisoner's face fell.

"Then what will he do?"

"We return to-morrow to France."

"To France? — and I?"

"You shall go with us; and now comes my good news. My lord has determined to take you to Parsy."

"To Parsy!"

"Yes; to the convent of St. Cecilia. Have you not some interest in that sisterhood?"

Flushed with pleasure, yet incredulous, De Bersier could only stammer:

"But this — this act — oh, can it be true!"

"You will of course give your knightly word that you will make no attempt to escape?"

"Of course. You may have my word, father. But how can I thank my lord — how repay —"

"My lord looks for no reward, my son," the monk broke in. "But I have somewhat further to explain. The quarrel with the Duke of Bourbon has put my master in a strange frame of mind. He is subject to recurring fits of whimsical and arbitrary ill humour. One of these is now upon him, and bids fair to last many days. He has retired within himself, has ordered an absolute incognito, and will communicate with no man. So you must be content to learn nothing as yet of your protector's name, nor must you venture to approach him. Can you consent to these conditions?"

"It were strange, father, did not I, a stranger — incognito myself — consent to whatever is required by one whose whole course is shaped to my advantage. Truly, father, I am no ingrate."

"Good, then!" the monk said, rising. "Remember we set out to-morrow. I shall leave you now to rest. You have great need of repose."

De Bersier bowed his head while the priest pronounced a blessing, and then the two separated.

Far into the small hours did Father Vincent pace the road before his tent, his head bowed and his mind preoccupied.

Matters had taken a turn quite unforeseen, and the future conduct of his vicarious vendetta promised many difficulties.

First in importance was to conceal from each of these men the mind of the other. If De Bersier learned that his deliverer was the husband of his sister, all Father Vincent's fabric of evil would fall to the ground. In the monk's favour was Du Beaulieu's own order for concealment of the truth, since it justified every precaution the priest might take to protect his plans.

But what would be the end?

Here was Father Vincent's difficulty. Du Beaulieu had sworn to confront these supposed guilty lovers. Could he accomplish this, he would learn that they were brother and sister. Yes, but would he believe them when they told him the truth? The winged helmet was against it, for Du Beaulieu believed that this was the young prisoner's crest. He did not know that it was a mere love-token from the damsel immured at St. Cecilia with the countess.

At thought of this last lady, the monk lost heart again. Here would be a witness. She would disclose the prisoner's identity, and explain with ease the winged helmet. No, — decidedly this coming together of brother and sister must be prevented. But how?

It was this that occupied the monk that night, and the problem proved beyond his tired brain.

When he at length sought a brief repose, it was with the determination to await a later inspiration. During their long journey back to the Bourbonnais, he would have ample time to prepare some sufficient plan.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOMEWARD BOUND

BEFORE sunrise the next morning the great imperial camp was raised, and the vanguard was already in motion toward Milan, under the command of Pescara.

Soon afterward the German forces, with their Burgundian allies, were in motion, the myriad men and horses crystallizing from a seeming chaos into ordered battalions, under the magical influence of drum and clarion.

In one spot only was no activity shown, and it was with wondering eyes that the passing soldiers gazed upon the tents of Du Beaulieu, devoid of banner and sentinel, apparently deserted.

But when the last company of Burgundian horse had disappeared, leaving only a veil of dust upon the distant road, Du Beaulieu's men emerged from their tents and began their preparations for departure.

They worked without enthusiasm, for they had

looked forward eagerly to the fight and the spoils of battle. But they laboured industriously, for their master's eye was upon them.

Long before midday, they, too, had departed, and on the road to Bergamo there trotted a sullen troop, uninspired by martial music, identified by no banner or heraldic shield, and seeming in their morose silence the very incarnation of their master's smouldering jealous hate.

Du Beaulieu had chosen the road through the Furka pass, in order to avoid the imperial army. It was also a new one for his company, and he thus ran no risk of being recognized.

At the head of his force rode the count, unaccompanied, and suffering no one to address him save when impelled by necessity. He was followed by his men-at-arms, after whom, and at some distance in the rear, rode Father Vincent and young De Bersier side by side. After these two, and far behind them, moved the mule teams which carried the count's baggage.

The long journey was marked by no accident of importance. Only the behaviour of Father Vincent is worthy of note.

For three days he scarcely spoke, but rode beside his perplexed companion with bowed head and inattentive ear.

On the fourth day, however, all this was changed. Some burden seemed lifted from his mind, and from that time forward De Bersier found him more cheery in manner and entertaining in speech than he had supposed possible in a man of his temper and vocation.

One night the party camped near Lausanne, and Father Vincent said he wished to confer with certain ecclesiastics near the city.

He visited a certain hostelry, where he was received with marked respect.

Here he wrote a letter which he addressed to "The Chevalier Louis Delmar, at the Convent of St. Mark, Lyons."

This he entrusted to a messenger, who, with his horse, was supplied by his host. The man set off at once, with instructions to reach Lyons at the earliest possible moment.

The next day Father Vincent's horse went lame, and the company made but little progress. A new horse was secured at Geneva, but, by some fatality, the travellers met with constant and vexing delays.

Whatever Monsieur Delmar's instructions, he seemed destined to have plenty of time to carry them out.

Shortly after they crossed the frontier, Father

Vincent received a written reply to his message, whose contents seemed greatly to please him.

That afternoon he left the prisoner and ventured to approach the count at the head of the company.

"My son, may I have speech with you?" he said.

"Willingly, father," replied the count. "I know your conversation will not be idle."

This compliment was received with a grave bow, and the monk continued:

"We are approaching Lyons. May I ask if you intend to enter the city?"

"No, that were dangerous. Too many questions will be asked. We shall pass to the north. I have some thought of taking the road through the pass of Meroix, and approaching the convent from the east."

"Surely, my son," said the priest, earnestly, — "surely you forget that the bishop and most of the lesser clergy in the diocese of Parsy are in strong sympathy with the king. You would be mad to pass the convent on the way to Beaulieu. You should not even go to your own castle until reconnoissance is made to determine the circumstances awaiting you. What if Beaulieu has been confiscated, and is now occupied by a royal garrison?"

After some moments of silence the count replied:

"My last advices were that all was safe, but, to

be sure, that was some time ago. I think you are right, father. What do you advise?"

"Avoid Lyons by all means, but, after passing it, let us regain the Lyons-Thiers road on the other side of the Rhone. At a safe distance on this side of Beaulieu — say near the hamlet of Vertel — do you command a general halt. Then let me ride ahead with the prisoner and one man-at-arms. We will ride to the junction with the Meroix road and turn back toward St. Cecilia. By the time we have reached this point, I shall have learned the state of the country, and will then ride on to the convent, and, armed with an order from you, get my lady and join you with the two lovers at the castle of Beaulieu or elsewhere."

At the mention of the lovers, the count's face darkened.

"Your reasoning seems just, father," he said. "But why take the prisoner with you?"

"Could you see your face at this moment, you would guess my reason. I dare not leave him behind with you. He would surely seek conversation with you — "

"Yes, yes, you are right there. I could not trust myself. But surely you should take a guard with you. Why not take at least two men, and send back only one?"

"Oh, my son! You have but little foresight. Would not my lady recognize your soldiers? She does not know me, and will willingly accompany a priest and her lover to meet an unknown benefactor."

"Yes," said the count, "I have only one man whom she does not know. Besides, she would recognize the livery. You are always right, father. I will ask no more questions, but leave all to you. Direct our movements, therefore, in all things."

Du Beaulieu realized his own weakness in intrigue, and was quite ready to leave the many details he now foresaw in the hands of his confessor. He did not stop to think how little the furthering of a murderous plot comported with a priest's vocation.

He thought of but one thing — dreamed of nought else — asleep or waking — his vengeance, and what seemed to him justice upon those two who had disgraced his name. To all his other bitterness was added the thought that, for his enemy's sake, he had renounced the service of his feudal prince.

Thus it came about that on the night of the first of March, 1525, the little battalion encamped beside the road running westward from Lyons to Thiers, near the hamlet of Vertel. They had passed Lyons

well to the north, and had progressed without accident to within a day's march of Beaulieu.

Late the next morning, after a long conference with the count, Father Vincent set out with De Bersier and a single soldier toward Beaulieu. Besides their own horses, they took with them a led horse. De Bersier asked what this was for, and was told that his lady was to ride it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

GILBERTE'S PROGRESS

For knowledge of the following events, we are indebted to the written account left behind by Gilberte, maid of the Countess Yvonne du Beaulieu; for, although we have found it necessary to temporarily abandon her narrative immediately after the escape from the castle, it is to be understood that the manuscript left by her covers the whole period of this present history.

After the struggle between Delmar and De Bersier, the event of which was determined by her interposition, Gilberte proceeded directly to the house of a widowed sister who lived on the road to Parsy.

Her peasant birth and early training had given her a minute acquaintance with every field and grove, every road and foot-path, for miles around. Her brothers had been incorrigible poachers, and, as a child, she had been permitted to accompany them on their night raids. Thus she had learned

the country over a very wide compass, and could find her way by the shortest routes even in the dark.

When she entered the service of the countess, she had outgrown these pranks, but her knowledge of woodlore and of local geography never deserted her.

It will be remembered that Father Paul, when he left Beaulieu, took the Parsy road, turning southward from the highroad to Lyons, at the same time that Father Vincent, coming from Pompelac, turned westward toward Beaulieu.

That night Father Paul stopped at the little cottage of Gilberte's sister, and thus it was that the priest and Gilberte met and were able to go together to Tavant's mill to see the last of Du Beaulieu's troop on its way to Italy.

The advent of Father Paul brought to Gilberte's mind her promise to her lover. Who would more willingly teach her to read and to write than this priest, whose devotion to the lady of Beaulieu was so well known? He would understand her motives, and would aid her in all her efforts to benefit her mistress.

She revealed her plan to him, and requested his coöperation. He could only point out that they two could not become a permanent charge upon the widow in whose house they had sought refuge.

This did indeed seem a real difficulty. Gilberte could do nothing to help her sister, who lived on the small savings her husband had left, supplemented by the spinning of yarn, for sale to customers in Parsy.

Then Gilberte remembered her brother Bertin. He kept a large and prosperous hostelry upon the Lyons road. This house stood about six miles east of where the road to Meroix pass diverged to the northeast, there being about two miles of unbroken forest and rolling land between this inn and the gloomy crags of the pass.

The inn of the Rocking Mitre — for such was its sign — afforded the only accommodation for man and beast between Vertel on the east and Beaulieu on the west. It followed that no man passed without turning into the hospitable yard, unless he were driven by unusual necessity.

Hither Gilberte persuaded the Franciscan to accompany her, rather to see her safely to her destination than with the thought of accepting Bertin's hospitality.

As it happened, the host of the Rocking Mitre was short-handed, and his business most prosperous. His energetic sister was of all people the best suited to assist him, particularly as the housewife was in very delicate health.

Gilberte's offer was most acceptable. She was willing to take full charge of the entire house, save the kitchen and dining-rooms, leaving these to Bertin himself. For these services she stipulated board, lodging, and clothes for herself and Father Paul, for she had determined that nothing should be allowed to part her from the aged priest.

Bertin closed with the offer on the spot, and ordered up a bottle of prime Burgundy to seal the bargain.

The Franciscan, half-perplexed and half-amused, could offer no reasonable objection, only stipulating that he might earn his support by commencing Gilberte's instruction at once. To this Gilberte was most willing to consent.

Thus it was that Gilberte was installed as housekeeper at the Rocking Mitre, while Father Paul found himself tutor to a peasant girl, and the confessor and moral ruler of the household.

Bertin's wife died shortly afterward, and thus the arrangement assumed almost at once a permanent aspect.

Gilberte was astonished at the difficulty of the task which she had set herself in learning to read and write. In a country where girls often married at the age of fourteen, this woman of twenty was deemed mature. Her mind, already set, found this

new field of activity full of irritating obstacles, and the slow fingers halted and stumbled with temper-trying results. Many were her tears of despair, and deep the fits of melancholy caused by her self-distrust.

She had always thought herself rather more clever than those about her, and had even patronized Father Paul at times, as one apart from the world and needing others' care. But when she saw the ease with which his aged hand accomplished what her young fingers refused, she was humbled, — first angry and then tearful.

But her will was inflexible, and, after the first year of nerve-racking drudgery, she was amazed to find herself actually liking her work.

Soon after this, Father Paul, whose patience had never once given out, ventured to suggest the study of Latin. He insisted that she had mastered the elements of reading and writing in French, and pointed out that he must continue to earn his support by teaching, or leaving the Rocking Mitre altogether. This reasoning prevailed, and Gilberte, urged somewhat by a certain awed curiosity, commenced the study of the sacred tongue.

The two years which elapsed between the escape from Beaulieu and the spring of 1525 were thus

passed by Gilberte between the care of a large inn and the determined pursuit of study.

Gilberte thus became a being at the time unique, — a peasant and a woman who was yet able to read and write, not only French but simple Latin as well.

The story of these years occupies many pages in Gilberte's manuscript, but they concern this history only in so far as they explain her learning and her being installed as mistress of the Rocking Mitre.

But her own account of the spring of 1525 touches our tale directly, and becomes, indeed, the principal source of the tradition from which this portion of our history is drawn. At this point, then, let her tell the story in her own words.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LEGEND OF THE ROCKING MITRE

(From Gilberte's Manuscript)

THE early part of the year 1525 was but a lean one for my brother.

The foreign war had withdrawn all the wealthy nobles from our region. With but one or two exceptions, they were all engaged in the field, either with Bourbon or the king. This cut off the travel that used to come from the dealings of these lords with the towns. In addition to this, commerce was less, and between the two causes we saw but few guests at the Rocking Mitre.

For this cause we had dismissed several servants, and, when our customers did make their appearance, I found myself obliged to aid my brother in serving them, besides doing my duty in my own part of the house.

Thus it was that when the Swiss merchant and his daughter arrived, I was obliged to make them welcome, Bertin being engaged elsewhere.

The month of February was drawing to a close when a carriage travelling westward stopped at our door. It was muddy underfoot with the spring thaw, while out of a dark sky there blew a raw wind that made travel far from agreeable.

From the mud-plastered vehicle there stepped an elderly man, who approached the house tenderly supporting a young woman, and, as I saw by the peep I got of her face in her travelling hood, that she was very pale, I hurried to stir up the fire and throw on another log.

"A bitter day, sir!" I exclaimed. "And a hard one for a damsel, I'm sure."

I helped the girl remove her wrappings, and the appealing beauty of her young face touched me.

Her father was leaning over the fire toasting his hands as he answered me.

"Ay, mistress," he said, "a bitter day and an uncanny neighbourhood in times like these."

At this he bustled back to his daughter, and began rubbing her cold, white hands between his heated palms, while she smiled faintly into his face, leaning back in her chair.

There was a sudden distant crash in the kitchen. I was staring at the young woman, and, to my surprise, she leaped to her feet with a convulsive move-

ment, turning a glance of terror toward the inner apartment.

"What's that?" she cried.

"Only some careless scullion, miss," I said. "Some hussy who has dropped a dish."

"There, dear, there!" said her father, soothingly, as she fell back in her seat. "Forget past dangers, my daughter. You are in perfect safety here."

"Safe as a chick in its shell!" I cried, reassuringly. "The damsel is tired," I said to her father. "Shall I not take her up to her room?"

"Will you go, dear?" he asked.

"Yes, please."

I led the way, and, after I had shown the guests their rooms and helped the girl to make herself comfortable, I returned to the main living-room, where I found Bertin.

I told him what I had seen and heard.

"What talk is this of danger?" he exclaimed. "War-times are only dangerous to the country invaded. In our time all the rascals have hurried to the front, to find the quarrels they fatten on."

"Still, I know that something has badly frightened the girl," I insisted. "These Swiss are good, hardy, sensible people. Their nerves are not shaken nor their faces paled by a mere nothing."

He shook his head, and then advanced to repeat my earlier welcome, bowing to the burgher, who at that moment reached the foot of the stair.

"Well, my good host," he exclaimed, pleasantly, "what may I expect to find in your larder?"

This led to a discussion of a man's chief science, the great Science of Eating. At the end of it all, our guest had ordered a well-chosen meal to be served up-stairs for two. While waiting, he said, he would have a bottle of our Clos-de-Prés, which he begged my brother to share with him.

I went at once to the kitchen to give the necessary directions for the meal.

This done, I had occasion to pass through the living-room again. Bertin stopped me.

"Ah, here she is!" he cried. "Gilberte, I was just telling our guest that you knew the legend of the Rocking Mitre better than I did myself."

Our guest was sipping his wine standing before the fire with one hand behind him. Bertin, who had emptied his glass, was standing by the table.

"I was puzzled by the sign of your inn," the Swiss explained. "The Rocking Mitre is an idea quite new to me. I asked your brother the history of this name, and he said you were best qualified to tell it to me."

I laughed and shook my head at Bertin, who was smiling roguishly.

"That is some of Bertin's nonsense, sir!" I said. "He has heard me tell the simple tale once or twice to a friend, and he teases me by insisting that I alone know how to tell it."

"And I'll venture to assert he is not mistaken," said the Swiss. Then, as he drew the easy chair forward beside the fire, he went on:

"Now I beg of you to favour me with the recital. I am a traveller whose greatest pleasure is in observing mankind, and in gathering together just such legends as I feel sure this is. Will you grant my desire?"

There was so much civility in this speech, and so little of affectation in the burgher's manner, that I seated myself at once and looked into the fire, collecting in my mind the details of the story.

At last I raised my head and met his eye.

"I will comply," I said, "on one condition."

He bowed with a half-smile and said:

"Pray name it."

"Why! That when I have done you will give us in exchange one of the many stories which you have gathered in your travels."

Bertin frowned at me and shook his head. But

I thought I knew my man and answered my brother with a pout.

The Swiss looked pensively through his glass at the light, sipped at it in silence, and then, smiling suddenly down upon me, he replied:

"You wish a true story, mistress. What you really desire is to know the reason for my daughter's nervous apprehension. Tell me — am I wrong?"

The man had read my mind exactly. I blushed, and dropped my eyes. He laughed good-naturedly, as though pleased at his own penetration.

"A natural desire. Quite natural, I'm sure. And what is more, I have reason to think it my duty to comply with your wishes. So let it be a bargain, mistress. Your tale first, and then my exchange."

I shot a look of triumph at Bertin, who seemed much relieved at our guest's complaisance.

And now I shall here set down the little legend of the Rocking Mitre, for only a few of us old people are left who remember it, and it deserves a permanent place in my children's hearts. And this for good reasons, too.

It was long centuries ago, when the cruel faith of the Druids still reigned in the deep half-savage forests of France, when Roman governors lived

in cities far apart, separated by vast regions that scarce knew the name of Rome.

Into the midst of our wild country there came a holy man who preached the true religion, baptizing the heathen forest-dwellers, and teaching them of the Saviour and of his Virgin Mother.

In the rugged hills to the north of Parsy there lived a tribe independent of those about them, and owning the sway of a petty king, whose very name is now forgotten.

When the holy man first came preaching the gospel, the jealous Druids made him a prisoner and brought him to the royal court for judgment.

The king at that time lay at the gate of death, being afflicted with a malady hitherto unknown. His mother held the regency, and when the missionary, being brought before her, told of the miracles of the Son of God, she commanded him to heal her son, or die under the sacrificial knife in the sacred grove.

The Christian went in to the dying king and knelt beside him in prayer. Then, standing uncovered in the presence of the curious throng, he said, stretching forth his hand: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, arise," and lo, the king ceased his moaning and stood upright. And from that day he was cured.

The king's mother, who dearly loved her son, saw in this miracle the finger of God, and was straightway converted. She was baptized that very day in the clear water of the forest stream, and before long the whole tribe became converts; for this was only the first of this holy man's miracles.

After the healing of the king, the missionary was known as "*L'homme de la mère du roi*" (the king's mother's man), and, this proving a name overlong for common speech, in course of time he was called Mère roi — and then Meroi. To this day his name clings to the pass where the king's rough dwelling stood. The reason for this you shall see.

When the tribe was converted, Meroi became its bishop, and the rude artisans of the forest constructed for him a mitre of vast proportions — so great indeed that, when he preached, he was forced to set the mitre upon the ground before him. Now this mitre was so shaped that it stood upon a curved rim, and, as Meroi preached in the open air, the forest breezes would set it rocking, and so, in the mouths of many, Meroi was called the Rocking Mitre to the day of his translation.

For you must know that, so holy was this apostle to the Gauls, that the good God suffered him not to taste the bitterness of death, but on a certain night

he was warned in a dream that his time was come to enter paradise.

Obeying this revelation, the good Meroi took solemn leave of the tribe he had converted, and, standing upon the loftier of the two summits at the royal pass, he was caught up before the eyes of his faithful tribe and transported to paradise.

But the saint's massive mitre was left behind as a reminder to his people, and to this day it may be seen standing over the pass of Meroix, a giant stone shaped like a mitre, yet so delicately poised that a strong man may rock it to and fro upon its rocky pedestal.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A BRUSH WITH BEDREDDIN ALI

THE Swiss was much pleased with the legend, and protested that he would cherish it among his most precious possessions.

"And this famous pass?" he asked. "Is it near your hostelry?"

"Two miles through the forest," said my brother. "It stands nearly due north. The road to the Saone from the convent of St. Cecilia, after topping the ridge, descends into the lower lands through a cut in the living rock. A vertical cliff bounds the road on either side, and upon the flat top of the southern wall rests the rocking mitre. The peasants hereabout claim that Meroi left it as a protection for the faithful."

"And now," I said, with returning curiosity, "now, sir, it is your turn."

"True!" said the burgher. "I must keep my promise."

He poured another glass of wine, and, still standing with his back to the fire, he began:

"My tale is not concerned with the miracles of long ago. I can only relate the truth about a very real occurrence now only two days old.

"As I said before, I am an enthusiastic traveller, and in my wanderings in Asia Minor, among the Moors, and through the wild country north of the Danube, I have acquired a love for out-of-the-way routes and unusual modes of travel.

"On this occasion I design a mere visit to a relative near Thiers, and, knowing that France was in a state of quiet, I permitted my daughter to accompany me.

"Instead of taking the direct route to Lyons, and thence westward to Thiers, I decided to buy a barge to carry horses and servants as well as ourselves, and proceed down the Saone with the current.

"So much for my fancy for unbeaten paths.

"All went well until we had passed Belleville. A few leagues below this village we passed a ferry, near which was anchored a galley of great length, but quite unornamented. So deserted did all this region seem that such a vessel might apparently be there half a year and not be noticed. The crew seemed not to court notice either, for, as we ap-

proached this galley, we could see no living being about it.

"There was a disturbing unreality about it all, and I remember that, as I watched the motionless hull, its towering prow reflected in the quiet river, I felt the creepy fascination of a bad dream — the chill of a nightmare, but partly developed.

"Nor was this instinctive repugnance mistaken, for, imagine my dismay, on reaching a point somewhat below this ship, at seeing a long boat full of armed men slip from behind the quiet hull and come swiftly toward us, propelled by six pairs of oars. I needed but a single glance to see that these men were Moors."

"Moors!" cried Bertin. "How came they up the Saone? What are they doing here?"

"They are pirates, hunting for slaves, my friends. You know how these monsters ravage our southern coasts. The absence of the king and his armies — the lax government of the queen regent in her son's absence — have greatly emboldened these desperate infidels, and they have sailed night by night past your cities; I can only explain it thus."

Bertin and I exchanged looks of terror.

"But are you sure?" I cried. "How do you know?"

"Because I have travelled in Moorish dress from

Egypt to the Pillars of Hercules. I know their language, and can even speak it fairly well."

"Saints in heaven protect us!" I exclaimed, fervently.

"Surely their protection was with me!" the Swiss exclaimed. "My men perceived at once that something was wrong, and at my cries of dismay they did what was most natural, and sought to escape to the right bank of the river, the galley being anchored in a small bay near the left bank. In the frantic haste of this attempt two oars were broken, so that we were obliged to propel our heavy craft with but four oars.

"I saw at once that we could not reach the right bank, and despair seized my heart. I lifted my clumsy musket, the only firearm we had, and began to load it. I knew what these men wanted, — not our lives, but our property and ourselves to sell as slaves in Barbary or Tunis.

"I resolved to waste neither powder nor shot in a useless defence, but to save my ammunition for my daughter.

"For a time, my friends, I believed that only by death could my daughter escape the living hell of a shameful slavery.

"Suddenly I saw what gave me a ray of hope.

Just below us on one side of the river, there were some rapids.

"Instantly I bade my men make for these. I felt sure that our great, clumsy structure would pass through this water with little damage, and, at the worst, would be able to land below the troubled water in a half-wrecked condition. But the pirates were in a light boat, which would be at once upset by the foaming waves. I knew, therefore, that they would not dare follow us into these rapids.

"The Moors saw the change in tactics, and at once redoubled their efforts to reach us before we could escape into the troubled water.

"Once more all hope abandoned me, and, turning to my daughter, who had not understood our position, I explained what we had to expect, and told her to commend her soul to God. I was wrong to have told her. The frightful prospect of slavery nearly unhinged her mind. She fell on her knees, imploring me, in her dead mother's name, to slay her at once, not to wait longer, since capture was certain.

"I looked toward our pursuers. They were within a boat's length of us, and I saw their fierce faces as plainly as I see yours now. One of the ruffians pointed excitedly at my daughter, crying

in Arabic, 'Look! look, Bedreddin Ali! See the virgin with the houri's face!'

"I recognized in the name thus spoken that of a slave pirate famous in the market-place of Tunis.

"I was turning to my daughter with the intention of ending her life at once, when a last desperate expedient entered my mind.

"Turning to the boat, I cried out in Arabic the Mahometan confession of faith, 'There is but one God and Mahomet is his prophet.'

"In pure astonishment the three oarsmen ceased rowing at once. Before they could rally I continued my speech:

"'Let Bedreddin Ali arise and greet the brother of his sister's husband,' I cried.

"I babbled the first nonsense that came into my head, but it was sufficient for my purpose, which was to confuse and nonplus the pirates.

"My plan succeeded admirably. Completely taken aback at hearing their own speech in the mouth of an infidel Frank, called upon suddenly to greet a relative who might or might not exist, the ruffians were too confused to continue at once their chase.

"One man stood up and then another. They talked confusedly among themselves, and before I had turned again to my daughter we were in the rapids, and safe from further pursuit.

"We passed through the rapids without appreciable damage, guided, no doubt, by the blessed saints, for we saw many sharp rocks on either hand, and the strength of the current was such that we had no control over our craft. Before we turned the next bend we had the satisfaction of seeing the pirates pulling back to the galley, and we knew that we were saved.

"I assure you, my friends, that this adventure has cured me of leaving the beaten path when travelling with my daughter."

Such was the narrative of the Swiss traveller, and it will be easily believed that it produced a real panic at the Rocking Mitre.

The ferry near which these pirates were lurking was that upon which the Meroi road abutted, and already in fancy I could see the ruffians coming as far as the Lyons road to return eastward by the inn of the Rocking Mitre, ravaging as they went.

My terror was very real, and I fear that I was but a poor comforter to the damsel when she came down-stairs. No wonder she looked pale! No wonder she jumped with nervous terror at every noise! I felt that if I had been in her place I would have lost my wits, never to recover them.

Bertin, too, looked grave, and the next morning, after the departure of our guests, he informed me

that he was going to Parsy to call out a force of volunteers against the Moors.

At first I pleaded almost upon my knees that he stay at home. I pointed out that he was my only protector, as Father Paul could not, and the chicken-hearted stableboys would not, resist an attack.

But my brother rightly observed that he would have plenty of time to get back with reinforcements before the pirates could get to us by the roundabout Meroi route. Besides, he said, these wretches could not have designs upon regions so far from the river. Why else should they lie so close to their galley?

I confess that I was a coward at that moment. Never in the presence of real danger have I yielded to craven fear as I did before this most improbable of possibilities. It was the vivid account of our guest and the sight of his nerve-shaken daughter that set me to trembling. Yet let it not be thought that I intend to lay the blame of my fault upon others.

At length I let my brother leave me, and his stay proved longer than I had expected, through the scarcity of brave men to volunteer against the robbers. Yet within the few days of his absence there occurred that which cancelled from my mind at once his errand and all thought of my own danger.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN OLD ENEMY APPEARS

I HAVE gone into some detail to account for being left alone during the trying days that followed. This I have done in justice to my brother, and that it might not be thought that Bertin lightly left me, his sister, to shift for myself with four lazy wenches and three cowardly stablemen.

Father Paul was worse than useless, for at that time he was suffering with a chill and fever, so that he was confined to his bed.

It was the hour before the midday meal on the day after Bertin's departure. A wine-grower from Chateldon had lately arrived, and, as he seemed a person of some little consequence, I was in the kitchen superintending his ragout.

Our youngest maid Jacquette wandered aimlessly into the kitchen and propped herself idly against the wall. She was an idle baggage, and I would have set her at work with a smart cuff as a fillip had

I not been preoccupied with the guest's meat which I was in the act of dishing up.

A few moments later, however, I overheard a whispered remark addressed to the cook, which arrested my attention.

"You should see the splendid plume in his cap!"

I turned quickly to the gossip.

"What is this nonsense?" I cried, sharply. "Of whom are you gabbling, you idle empty-head?"

"Of the guest in the wine-room, mistress," she replied, humbly.

"Why, you silly hussy, the man is a sober vigneron, from Thiers way. He is no gay court ruffler that he should sport plumes in his cap."

"Oh, not he!" she exclaimed, shaking her head, earnestly. "I mean the new guest. He who has just entered."

I looked at her with amazement.

"What!" I cried. "You dare to let a guest walk unwelcomed into our house, and do not even warn me of his arrival! Who is with him?"

"The other guest, mistress," was the frightened reply.

"Not even a maid!" I exclaimed, scandalized. "I declare, I ought to give you a good beating. I would if I had but the time! Open that door, now,

quick — and you, La Douce, carry in the ragout at once."

I lingered a few minutes to remove my kitchen apron and touch my hair here and there, for a hostess should make a decent appearance. Then I followed the maids and entered the wine-room, where my guest had chosen to take his meal.

I swept the room with a glance and at once perceived the newcomer — a dandy, indeed, to judge by his fine dress.

He sat near a window, out of which he was looking, so that I did not see his face.

I put on my official smile, and bustled across the room to greet this gentleman, whose appearance was an augury of good custom.

He heard my quick step, and turned toward me.

My knees bent, and I stumbled as though some one had struck my head with a cudgel.

This man was Delmar — Louis Delmar!

My amazement, mixed with sudden dread, may be imagined. I knew not how far my face expressed my feeling, as I stood there, nailed to the floor, staring into that man's face.

He seemed at first amused, then annoyed at my paralyzed stare. It was, indeed, a sufficiently ridiculous welcome — though little enough did I think of that then.

"Well, mistress!" he said, with a certain acid politeness, "are you ill, or do I strike you as a freak of nature?"

Only then did I recollect that, though I had been able to study his features on that fearful night two years before, he had never seen me. He did not know me, and, as I realized it, the relief the thought afforded me inspired some shreds of wit for a plausible reply.

"Pardon me, sir — your lordship!" I faltered. "It was a dream — like a miracle — I am overcome, you see!"

"A dream! What do you mean?" As I had expected, this hint of the supernatural interested him, and rendered him less critical.

"Yes, your lordship," I said. "You see, it was three nights ago, your lordship — "

"Less lordship!" he interrupted, impatiently. "Call me simply monsieur."

"Yes, monsieur. It was but three nights ago that I dreamed that I came into that very door from the kitchen, and by the window I saw sitting a nobleman. His face was turned from me at first, but as I came forward, he turned to me — even as you did, monsieur, but now — and — and — Oh, monsieur!" I cried. "Your face I saw — as plainly then in my dream as now."

I hid my face in my hands and broke down.

I do not know what would have happened had I not managed to thus create an excuse for weeping and sobbing out my heart. The helpless terror with which this man's arrival had filled me called for a vent, and I had to cry out and hide my face.

Delmar made no reply, but I heard the vigneron exclaim:

"Passing strange in sooth, mistress! And what happened then?"

I shook my head, unable to control my voice. I scarce dared to uncover my eyes, fearing to observe how far my explanation had satisfied De Pompelac's brother.

At length he spoke, and I perceived that I had allayed any suspicion that my behaviour might have aroused.

"There, there, my good woman!" he said, in a voice that betrayed some uneasiness. "There is no accounting for these dreams. Yours gave you no reason to fear me, I hope."

There was a certain anxiety in his voice, and I felt sure that I had convinced him of my good faith.

It was, therefore, with a reassured spirit that I dried my eyes, and, as soon as I could command my voice, assured him that I had told him all that I could remember of my dream.

Our further intercourse that day was limited to such conversation and such service on my part as our mutual position rendered necessary.

A fine rain came on during the time that my two guests were taking their dinner, and it lasted all that afternoon.

Despite the difference in their ranks, the vigneron and the cavalier spent the rest of the day and all the evening in friendly conversation. The weather rendered travelling highly disagreeable, the road being deep with mud, and the two men, confined as they were to the inn parlours and wine-room, were mutually drawn together.

As for myself, a subdued fever of anxious, formless dread grew upon me, and rendered me almost unfit for my duties. Repugnance for this man urged me to avoid him, while, at the same time, a conviction that his presence implied serious danger impelled me to watch him.

Driven thus by opposing feelings, I spent my day in vacillation. At one time I forced myself to attend my guests personally, seeking to gather some clue to Delmar's purpose in returning to our vicinity. Again, overpowered by unreasoning fear of the man, I left him to the care of the servants.

But it was at night that my mental anguish reached its climax. Then, my duties being over,

I had nothing to divide my attention, and I gave myself up to vain attempts to solve the riddle of Delmar's coming.

As I lay in hopeless insomnia, my mind reverted to that dreadful night when I had last seen this man. I seemed again to see the moonlight shining upon his face. I saw in memory that desperate struggle, and my muscles contracted involuntarily as I thought of the blow that had felled the coward to the earth — just in time. Yes — the mark was still on his temple, half-hidden by his hair. I had seen it.

I had thought the man dead, nor had I deemed it murder. To protect my mistress and those she loved — this was my full justification. But now, as from the dead, this man had arisen without warning. What was it he wanted? Here — so near to Beaulieu?

I did not consider that Pompelac was his — that in very fact he was now Baron de Pompelac — hated name! That he was on his way to his ancestral home was natural enough, but for some reason, this simple explanation of his presence did not occur to me.

No; something told me that this natural enemy of the De Bersiers was meditating some harm to

my mistress. She was still at St. Cecilia. Could he reach her?

I knew nothing of the man's influence at court. Perhaps he was a partisan of the king — a member, perhaps, of the queen regent's party — powerful, it might be, with the infamous chancellor, Du Prat. If so, what might he not accomplish through the Bishop of Parsy, whose word was law with the lady superior at St. Cecilia!

These thoughts and many others served to keep sleep from my pillow that night. Yet all I could resolve was to watch my suspicious guest with the utmost care, and, if I found aught that pointed to designs against my mistress, to warn her at once, at any cost.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE APPROACH OF THE UNKNOWN

THE next day was the second of March. Can I ever forget the date? Early in the morning I descended as usual, to see that the maids did their duty. The dawn was a clear one, promising fine weather.

To my surprise, Delmar was in the wine-room before me. He had appropriated the table near the westernmost front window, which could be curtained off at will from the rest of the room.

On seeing me, he ordered a bottle of white wine, and asked to be served with breakfast as soon as possible. Then, drawing the curtains close, he announced that he was not to be disturbed on any account save for meals and when he called for service.

I decided to let no one but myself wait upon the cavalier, so that I might observe him as far as

possible. Accordingly, I cooked his breakfast myself, and, with my own hands, carried it to his table.

I found him engaged in reading what appeared to be letters. He had taken them from a leather bag, which I had observed the night before. This he wore constantly, and it hung at his side by a strong leather strap which was passed over his head and rested on one shoulder. I have good reason to remember that strap and that little satchel.

As he returned the papers to their receptacle on my entrance, I remarked the great twin emerald shining in his ring. It was not a pleasant sight to me, for it brought his hateful brother to my mind more vividly than before.

When I left him to his morning's meal a curious impulse prompted me to seek that ring's companion. I had, of course, kept it with me ever since Albert had given it to me, and it was now in my room.

I obeyed this desire, and at once went to my room. Locking my door, I opened the chest in which I kept my clothing, and from the bottom of this chest I drew forth a package rolled up in cloth.

Ah, how often in those two long years had I unrolled this poor little package to dream over its contents! They seemed to bring me nearer to Albert.

There was the great clumsy dagger with which I had struck my famous blow. There was the ring Albert had given me — the emerald set in gold — the very twin of the gem that sparkled on Delmar's hand in the wine-room below me. And there, too, were the many letters I had written to my absent lover. Those pathetic little scrawls of which I had been so proud when I wrote them. Written and never sent, because no messenger had ever come to tell me where he might be found. But though I had received no word from Albert, never for a moment did I doubt his faithful love, and never did I doubt that the good God would bring him back to me when his duty was done.

While I was gazing at these trinkets, my mind full of I know not what thoughts, some one called me from below. I returned the letters quickly to their envelope, and tucked them into their place, but the dagger I placed under my mattress. As for the ring, it seemed to bring Albert before me, and I slipped it into my bosom as I hurried out of the room.

The summons proved to be on account of the departure of the wine-merchant, who wished to pay his bill.

This matter was settled without dispute, and I found myself alone with a sick priest, seven helpless

servants, and that man in the wine-room — the deadliest enemy of her I held most dear.

My mind no longer dwelt upon the fear of Moorish pirates. There was a danger more near and more mysterious. Every moment I became more thoroughly convinced that Delmar meant harm to my lady, and yet, no more clearly could I apprehend the man's design as time wore on.

To feel ever surer that great harm is approaching, and yet be totally ignorant of what it is that threatens! To know an attack is impending, yet not know whence it will come, nor when or where the blow will fall! Oh, this is the height of mental pain!

Yet this dreadful ordeal was of use to me, for it strung me up to a pitch of courage I had not otherwise commanded when the battle came. My nerves, at least, could not be taken by surprise. Let come what would, I should not again stumble and stare as I had done when first I saw Delmar.

The slow morning wore on, and Delmar still kept his place by the corner window, silent and invisible behind his close-drawn curtains. I had brought him his bottle of wine and his letters, and, immediately after his breakfast, he had called for a pen and a dish of ink. These I brought down to him from Father Paul's room.

I dared not tell the priest who was my sole guest

that day. He was helpless in his fever, and knowledge of the truth would have greatly harmed him, while doing me no good.

At about noon, hearing nothing from Delmar, I went out and crossed the road, pretending to have an errand at an outhouse. Looking back stealthily at the corner of the inn, I saw that Delmar was seated near the window, apparently gazing eastward toward Lyons. This convinced me that he was expecting some one from that direction.

On reaching the house I heard his call, and hurried to forestall Jacquette.

"My good woman," he asked, "can you tell me when the moon rises to-night?"

I thought a moment, and then hesitated as to whether to tell him the truth. I decided, however, that by deceit I might do harm to my lady's cause. So I replied, after a pause:

"At about ten o'clock, monsieur."

"Ten o'clock!" he repeated aloud, and then, as he turned away, he muttered something like, "They must not start too early."

"Will you have your dinner now, monsieur?" I asked.

"What is the time?"

"About one hour after noon, monsieur."

"Good! Give me a light repast — what you will

— I do not care. And stay — send me another bottle of that white wine."

As I was preparing this meal, there seemed to come over me the serenity of a desperate courage. The agony of suspense was lessened by a clearer vision of the future. I saw that Delmar expected a party from the direction of Lyons, and that among those coming was one at least whose recognition he desired to avoid. The use of that curtained space by the front window taught my reason this much.

But beyond this merely logical conviction I felt instinctively that the safety, and perhaps the life, of my dear mistress was at stake. I seemed to know that Delmar expected an enemy whose fate was closely linked to my lady's — and therefore my own.

When, therefore, I returned with Delmar's meal, I looked upon him with a calm understanding of concealed hate very far from my first tremulous dread. He must have seen the change in my eyes, for he laughed, and said:

"What is the matter, mistress? Has your dream been forgotten?"

I paused as I laid the dishes before him in order. Then I replied, simply:

"No, monsieur, but I have had another."

Then I left him without giving him time to question me further.

That afternoon wore on as had the morning. Delmar stuck to his post, and I was fully occupied with my servants and with Father Paul.

Toward the close of the day, the inward light that had sustained and informed me brightened. From a general sense it had become a distinct prophetic vision. I was employed in the kitchen, but I saw that the party we expected was approaching.

At once I left the house and stepped into the road. The sun was setting, and I turned my back upon it to gaze toward Lyons.

There it was, the distant group between the forest-trees which I knew I would see.

I glanced at Delmar's window. He was still watching the road. As yet the group was too far away for him to see, sitting as he was in the house.

As I entered the inn door I was attacked by a violent fit of trembling — the last expiring symptoms of my fear. I crept up to my room, knelt beside my bed, and prayed with an earnestness that was almost ecstasy for strength and guidance in what was before me.

My time had come to do and dare for my beloved

mistress. This I knew, although I could not guess what form my task would take.

My prayer over, I returned to the lower hall, prepared to face the enemy.

CHAPTER XL.

DELMAR RECEIVES A NOTE

I HEARD the hoofs in the outer yard, and the voices of the stableboys as they took charge of the horses. I stepped to the entrance to do my duty as hostess, and saw three men approaching.

The two in front were M. Henri de Bersier and a Dominican friar. They were followed by a soldier, fully armed, whom I did not know.

De Bersier dropped back a step at sight of me, and made a quick, but imperious sign that I should not recognize him.

I felt scarcely surprised — only a rising elation — the fever of coming combat.

I curtsied and smiled, and spoke my formal welcome, ushering the party into the wine-room, to the right of the main entrance.

The priest led the way to a table near the front window, farthest from the curtained space where sat Delmar.

There was no sign of life from that curtained corner, but I knew that Delmar was listening intently to catch any words the newcomers might let drop.

As soon as they were seated, the monk, who faced the curtained space, dropped his cowl, and revealed the hateful features of Vincent de Coruella.

I knew him at once, but as I met his eyes and he questioned me, he could not read in my mind those words of Father Paul's in the old mill, "Some day you may meet him again. If you do, remember this, he is a villain — a dangerous rogue."

"My daughter," he began, "have you lived long in this neighbourhood?"

"All my life, father."

"Ah! Then you should know of the family of Beaulieu. Can you give me news of them?"

I glanced at De Bersier, and caught a quick movement of his eyes. But in an instant he had resumed his apparent weary indifference, his fingers drumming lightly upon the table before him.

"Only such as all the country can give," I said to the priest. "The count has gone to the war, and my lady is confined in the convent of St. Cecilia."

M. de Bersier was by this time fully master of himself, and he gave no sign of interest in what must have been news to him.

"To the war," resumed the priest, in his quiet, even voice. "And on which side has he ranged his banner?"

"Why, as for that," I said, "I only know that he left Beaulieu for Lyons, and that it was understood that he had gone to join the forces of the king."

"So! Then there is no attainder — no confiscation of my lord's fiefs."

"Not that I have heard, father."

"And who holds the castle?"

"The count's seneschal, and a few old men with the women."

The monk looked meaningly at the man-at-arms who stood somewhat behind me, so that I did not see his face.

"See that this man has cold meat, bread and wine, at once, hostess," said Father Vincent. "He has a night journey before him."

I sent Jacquette for the provisions ordered, remaining myself to take the priest's order for his and his companion's meal.

As we talked, my mind was busy with the new facts at hand, but I made little progress in understanding of the situation.

I had last seen Father Vincent in the train of Du Beaulieu. Was his present ignorance of my lord's

movements feigned? I thought it must be. But how came young De Bersier in the company of Du Beaulieu's chaplain? Surely, he had not deserted the king's cause.

Again, I had thought De Bersier at the war, and yet, here he was, riding unarmed, without even a sword by his side. What could this mean?

The soldier, too, was a puzzle to me. He carried no sign of his lord's name. I knew every man-at-arms that followed the count. This man was not among them. Why was he going to ride on again — and at night?

The direction, at least, of this soldier's farther travel was not hidden from me. He had soon finished his meal, and in the dusk he rode off alone, retracing his steps toward Lyons.

One thing seemed certain. De Bersier was the enemy whom Delmar expected.

As the soldier rode away, I realized, with a swift flush of momentary dread, the desperate position of the young, unsuspecting knight.

He was totally unarmed, while Delmar had his sword and dagger. If the latter made an attack, De Bersier was lost. I could give no aid, and Father Vincent — Why, he was the tool of the De Pompelacs!

Instead of increasing my fear, this thought al-

layed it. I saw that the monk and Delmar were in coöperation. Father Vincent must have brought De Bersier thus far by treachery. If, then, these wretches had planned to murder the young man, the soldier would have been left behind. Besides, they could not foresee that they would find my inn empty, and my brother gone.

Then I thought that perhaps, for some reason, this was the first moment that the soldier could be shaken off. Might it not be the plan to secretly murder the chevalier in his bed?

All these gropings of an excited mind took place in the midst of the questions and answers exchanged between the monk and myself relative to the meal to be served. I had the cook called in, and gave her my orders in the presence of my guests.

This was, as I told them, to avoid mistakes, but the fact was that I had determined not to leave the three men alone.

I laid the covers as quickly as possible, and put the carving-knife beside the chevalier. This knife was a formidable affair of which my brother was very proud, and, as I saw De Bersier's listless hand toying with the great horn hilt, I felt less uneasy.

I was further reassured by Father Vincent's behaviour. He did not even notice that De Bersier

had been given the carving-knife, but sat in silence, gazing from the window.

As we waited for the arrival of the food, I sat and knitted, my mind still busy on the problem of those men. That old room probably never before held four people so silent and so thoughtful.

At length Father Vincent arose, and, apparently interested in something out-of-doors, sauntered slowly to the window next adjoining the curtains.

I had seen him draw some small object furtively from his robe, and, moreover, I knew it was now too dark for him to see anything outside. I saw at once that he was about to communicate with Delmar.

Watching him from the corner of my eye, while I knitted industriously, I saw the monk flip a folded paper over the curtain, and shortly afterward return to his seat.

De Bersier had seen nothing. Nor did he probably hear, as I did, the slight rustle of Delmar's furtive movements as he reached for the paper.

This manœuvre was, of course, proof positive of an understanding between the two men. Oh, how I burned to see what was written on that paper. A hint — only a hint I longed for — a single clue, which, piecing this with that, would serve to expose the mischief afoot.

I felt through this time a grim assurance that in

some manner it would be granted to me to conquer these men. It was this feeling that sealed my lips and made me act prudently. Without it I would have done some desperate thing — have tried to warn De Bersier, and probably have brought on the worst at once.

Before that night was over, I had regretted bitterly my prudent silence.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE NOTE IS ANSWERED

It was not long after the monk had thrown his message over the curtain, and he and De Bersier had begun their evening meal, when suddenly Delmar clapped his hands as a signal that he wanted service.

De Bersier started at this, and watched me as I hurried to the curtained corner to answer the summons. I heard him speaking low to the priest, who had affected surprise at the discovery that they were not alone.

The leather bag lay open upon the table before Delmar, and in its mouth lay a crumpled paper. I knew it must be the note that the monk had sent.

Delmar was folding a reply, which he placed unsealed in my hand together with a gold coin. Oh, how I longed to throw his money in his face! The cur! To offer a bribe to me!

I curbed my feelings, and merely curtsied, awaiting his orders.

"Take this note, mistress," he said very low, "and contrive to give it into the hand of the reverend father yonder. Let not his companion see it. The matter is important. Can I trust you?"

I simply nodded, and, taking the paper, returned to my seat and took up my knitting.

My first impulse had been to walk directly over to the monk and deliver the note openly, calling it to his attention in a loud voice. But I instantly decided to sit down first and think the matter over.

It was as well I did, for I almost immediately concluded to read the message, and act in the light of any knowledge it might give me.

Under the cover of the work upon which I was engaged, I opened the loosely folded sheet, and found thereon only these words:

"At the pass of Meroix to-night at moonrise."

I folded the paper and thought for a few moments.

To betray these men then and there would probably bring on an attack from which De Bersier, almost defenceless, could have no chance of escape. If they left the house — and this paper made it evident that they would be expected to do so that night — I could manage to convey a warning to De Bersier as he was leaving. Would it not be best to pretend compliance?

An impatient movement behind the curtains

decided me. Father Vincent glanced my way, and I held up the note so that he could see it plainly in my fingers. I sat behind the vicomte.

The monk's face did not change, but in a few moments he asked for a cloth to wipe some wine from the table. With the request he gave me a meaning look.

I brought the cloth, and in it the note and the gold piece together. He wiped up the wine himself, and laid the cloth down beside him, opening its folds stealthily with one hand while he lifted a glass to his lips with the other.

I think the coin surprised him. I know not what he thought of Delmar's sending him money, but he coolly pocketed the gold, and read the note with a single stolen glance into his lap.

A few minutes later he said, casually:

"I presume, my daughter, that the wife of an innkeeper has no time to learn to read. Have you ever given thought to this art?"

"To read!" I exclaimed. "Why, father, what should I learn to read for? I keep all our accounts in my head, and, as for books, they are only a distraction and a waste of time."

The sly monk shook his head sadly, and replied:

"Most true, my daughter. Would that all women saw this truth as you do. This late rage

among even the bourgeoisie to read and write is giving Satan a great advantage over the Church. In Germany it is the root of various growing heresies."

I saw very well that he wished to reassure himself that I had not read the message before I had delivered it to him. Delmar had not even considered the thing as remotely possible. Truly Father Paul had not been mistaken in the measure of this man!

M. de Bersier had not uttered a single word since his arrival. Once satisfied that I would not reveal my recognition of him, he maintained a dreamy reserve. There seemed to be some hoped-for end near at hand, and once I perceived a faint smile in his face, while his eyes seemed looking through and beyond the wall opposite him.

The two companions finished their meal very speedily. They had ordered but a scanty repast, and neither of them seemed to have a great appetite.

Their supper finished, the monk called at once for the bill. I named the amount due, and was given the hateful gold coin with which Delmar had sought to bribe me.

I went to my till to get small change in return. This took me a minute or two, during which my back was turned upon my guests. When I had

found what I wanted, and turned again to the table, the monk was alone.

"Where is monsieur?"

I stopped in a panic. I had nearly spoken his name.

"The chevalier has gone to get our horses," said the monk. "We are obliged to set off at once."

I controlled myself with an effort. This seemed the end!

Evidently the saints had abandoned me! All — all was against me!

I had relied upon these last moments to provide an opportunity for me to warn De Bersier to avoid Meroix. Danger awaited him there.

Now he was lost!

A thousand surmises — a thousand plans — cries of despair — of rage — of prayer — arose unuttered from the depths of my heart. No wonder that my memory was paralyzed, or that I let them go, weakly — inanely — believing that I should never see my lady's brother alive again.

I remembered that Delmar was still in my house. Probably this guided and controlled my conduct, for I felt instinctively that he was the real danger. That rendezvous at the pass of Meroix *must* be prevented. I must hold Delmar at any cost.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WISE WOMAN OF TOUR-ESPINES

I RETURNED to the wine-room in pitiable confusion of mind. It was not fear, but an anguish of unreadiness. As I entered the room, I saw Delmar standing ready for departure, his plumed cap upon his head, his leather satchel hanging at his side.

The sight of that bag turned the current of my thoughts, and, as by a miracle, the chaos of my brain was clarified and crystallized into complete order and inflexible purpose.

The secret of all this fiendish conspiracy was in that leather bag. Those letters he had been reading — the message from Father Vincent. In these I knew was the explanation of it all.

That bag I must have. Those letters I must have. I knew not how, but I knew that the saints would guide me, and I felt the calm strength and courage of a man as I closed the door behind me, and, with my back against it, faced this fit successor of that monster De Pompelac.

He was counting out some money upon a table, and he spoke to me as he did so.

"Here is your money, mistress. I think there will be some excess. Keep that for your extra trouble."

Then he looked up and saw my white, set face.

"You have had a third dream," he exclaimed, banteringly.

He lifted his hand as he spoke and pointed his forefinger at my eyes.

I saw the great emerald shining, and instantly obeyed my first impulse. This was to thrust my fingers into my dress and find the twin to his jewelled ring. I closed one hand upon the bauble and held it tight, while with the other I touched his own ring, and said:

"The twin emerald is my third dream, monsieur."

Like lightning he put his hand behind him, and looked about with startled eyes.

"What do you mean?" he said, savagely.

I went on speaking, impelled by an impulse I could never understand. It sounds incredible, but it is the truth, that I knew not for some time what I would say until it was said.

To Delmar's fierce question I replied, calmly:

"I mean only for the best, monsieur. Do you know the wise woman of Tour-Espines?"

He shook his head, glaring at me, evidently eager to know my meaning.

"She told me to watch for a cavalier wearing a great emerald on his right hand, and to test him to know if it were the 'twin emerald.'"

"Well, well!"

"She said that he who wore it was seeking some one dear to him, and that she could give him news of the one he sought."

Delmar started forward, pale with excitement, and clutched my closed hand with a painful grip.

"Look here!" he hissed, frowning black into my face. "Are you telling me fanciful lies, woman? What guarantee can you show of all this?"

I looked him calmly in the eye, and said:

"Does monsieur wear the twin emerald?"

"Yes."

"And is it true that monsieur is seeking one very dear to him?"

"Yes — yes!"

"Then the wise woman has told the truth — she has news for you — and the proof — is in your hand."

He released my fingers, and looked down into my palm as I opened my hand. The twin emerald of his brother glittered there in plain view.

"The twin!" he cried, turning pale. "My God! he is found! It is —"

He broke off, and looked searchingly into my face.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked, suddenly.

"No, monsieur, only that you must be he of whom the wise woman spoke."

He took the twin emerald, and, setting the two rings together, looked down upon them with evident agitation.

"Yes!" he murmured, with fullest conviction now. "This is his ring. He lives, and can be found. This mystery of two years will be solved. Yes — the talisman is a sure one. These women must have got it from him."

Then, addressing me with a kindlier manner, he said:

"Tell me, mistress. Where and when may this wise woman be seen?"

"Only at night, monsieur. Through the day she roams through the woods for simples."

"Take me to her to-night — at once!" he exclaimed, eagerly. "I will pay you liberally."

"Oh, I dare not go to-night," I replied, shrinking back with assumed terror. "Nor must you go, monsieur!"

"Why not to-night?"

"It is Friday!" I said, in an awed whisper. "On Fridays they say spirits may be seen hovering about her cabin. 'Tis then she speaks with her familiar."

He stamped his foot with impatience.

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "What silly superstition is this?"

"I will go with you, monsieur, to-morrow," I said.

"No; to-morrow night I must meet — I must be elsewhere. If you will not take me, tell me at least the route."

"Oh, no! oh, no!" I exclaimed, energetically. "Monsieur will be harmed, take my word for it!"

My opposition seemed to irritate him, and to confirm his obstinacy. This was my design.

"Damn the woman!" he cried. "Must I use force with you? Tell me the way, I say."

He shook me roughly by the arm.

"The safest way is the way of the light, monsieur. But do you dare — on a Friday?"

"Go on — the way — quick!"

I feigned fear, and answered with a craven mien — but triumphing mightily within.

"Oh, monsieur, pray, monsieur — have a little patience, I beg. The way is this — and pray attend with care. You follow the highroad to Lyons

until you reach a stone bridge. It is less than a mile — "

"Yes; I know the place."

"Good! Just on this side of the bridge and south of the road there stands a giant oak. If monsieur will stand on the east side of this oak, just touching it with his hand at arm's length, monsieur will see a light to the southward. This shines from the cabin of the wise woman."

"And is there a path?"

"It is open country — pasturage and ploughed fields without fences. I have only one caution for monsieur. That is to keep always in a straight line toward the right, after leaving the tree, otherwise there are obstacles."

He remained silent a moment. I thought he was hesitating, and said, slyly:

"Monsieur is afraid — on a Friday night?"

"Pooh!" he exclaimed. "My thoughts are far from your rubbishy superstition."

He straightened himself, threw his cape over his shoulders, and called for his horse. This did not suit my plan at all.

"If you ride, monsieur, you will arouse Pierre Lebarre's dogs, and the old farmer will come out with his lanthorn."

I knew that secrecy would be his natural desire.

He swore, and grumbled in uncertainty, and then broke out suddenly:

"To the devil with difficulties! I would follow this ring to hell! I'll walk."

He turned upon his heel, and in a moment had left the house. I followed as far as the door, and saw him start eastward in the dim starlight.

A strange feeling of lightness filled me. He had been made to forget that rendezvous at Meroix!

Running to my room, I found Albert's great dagger under the mattress. I tied this around my waist with a cord. Then I went to the kitchen and fitted a new candle in our largest lanthorn.

These things accomplished, I sat down out-of-doors back of the inn, and ate bread, which I washed down with milk, for I had eaten no supper that night.

As I supped, I followed Delmar's journey in thought, and I smiled as I strained my hearing to catch the cry that I knew would come.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE POACHER'S BEECH

I FINISHED my light meal, and set aside my dishes. Every nerve was tense as I stood waiting in the cool, still night.

Only the very distant hoot of an owl came — regularly, and at long intervals. Each breath I drew seemed a groan that might drown the sound for which I waited. I dared scarce breathe. I seemed to stand thus an hour.

He must walk a mile on the road, and then nearly as far across country to southward ere I could expect to hear that for which I waited.

I could not long stand still, but wandered about in the close behind the house, walking always on tiptoe — holding my breath as though at any moment the cry might come.

My thoughts returned to Father Vincent and his companion. They must be well on their way — whither? I was sure their destination was the con-

vent. My mistress was there — helpless — ignorant of danger.

Oh, why did my plan delay! Surely Delmar must have —

Ah! There it is. Faint in the distance — long-drawn. A cry full of terror. They could not have heard it in the house. This I thought of with satisfaction.

While with trembling hands I lit my candle from a lighted splinter I had brought with me from the kitchen, the cry was repeated.

It seemed the very spirit of human fear — refined by distance — diluted in the immense ocean of the air.

My lanthorn lighted and securely closed, I held it before me with one hand, and plunged confidently into the path to the Poacher's Beech.

My steps were quickened, and an eerie thrill stung me as I heard those agonized cries growing ever louder and nearer.

At length I could see before me the dark mass of the solitary beech, and could even distinguish the knoll from which it overhung the lower ground beyond.

Then I called out in answer:

"Courage! Courage! I am coming!"

There came back one — two — a number of quick, sharp exclamations of intense relief.

"Help! Be quick! Help! This way! Praise be to God and his saints!"

I brought my light to the edge of the knoll and looked over the steep declivity.

Yes, there he was. Faintly I could discern his form. I had calculated well.

The spring thaw had softened the quaking morass beneath me so that it was a true quicksand. The light I had named to him had lured my victim straight across the fatal spot. He was at my mercy.

"Where are you?" I asked.

"Here! Is it you, mistress? Oh, call help! I am caught by a quicksand. I am up to my hips in the grip of it! Be quick, or I am lost!"

"Are you still sinking?" I asked.

I did not intend that he should die. I could not have condemned even him to such a hideous end as this.

"No," he replied. "In my groping I caught a slender branch of the great tree above me. I tried to draw myself up by it, and heard it crack. It is only just strong enough to prevent my sinking farther. If I try to pull harder, it will break, and then I shall have no help. Oh, be quick, woman!

Find a pole — a rope — a vine — anything — only save me from this horrible death!"

"Hold fast!" I cried. "I am coming! Alas, monsieur, I told you a Friday night was not safe for this!"

Leaving the lanthorn at the foot of the tree, I clambered up the slanting trunk like a cat.

How often had I done this as a girl! Now my triumph and elation restored to me the force of girlhood, and in a few moments I had gained a stout bough directly above my enemy's head.

Along this limb I carefully extended myself, face down, and gazed with straining eyes at the vague shadows below, dimly visible in the luminous fog from my lanthorn standing on the ground.

In my dreams I have this moment often before me. We two alone, far out in the darkness that enshrouded us. In the distance the vague, accidental sounds of night, close beneath me only that man's panic breathing.

Through a blackness made faintly yellow by my light, I could just discern the up-staring white of his face. I could guess its mask of fear, and now and again the great emerald on the hand that clutched the bough caught my candle-light and flashed in my eyes. I lay there in silence, thinking of who that was below me in the merciless sucking

quicksand. The enemy of De Bersier — the brother of De Pompelac. Something more he was, and it was that I had resolved to discover. It was to wrest this secret from him that I had tricked him into this trap. I — a helpless woman.

My silence was so prolonged that Delmar grew frightened again.

"Where are you?" he screamed. "Why don't you speak? When will you help? Hello, there! Speak!"

"I am here," I answered, "directly over your head. But I have no cord. Have you no belt? Nothing I can pull you up with?"

"No, I have not — Hold! Here! I have a satchel and a strap. Can you reach down to it?"

I smiled at this.

How quickly my plans had yielded fruit!

In his terror he forgot all the value of that bag. Besides, how could he know that I was able to read?

"No," I replied, "I cannot reach it; but, if you will take it off and throw it up to me, I can catch it."

"But I cannot let go of this limb."

"Try to get the strap off by shifting your hold from hand to hand."

"But is the strap long enough, do you think?"

"Throw it up here and I will cut it next the bag on one side. The length single will reach, and I am sure it looked strong enough."

"Yes, it is strong indeed!" he exclaimed, in a hopeful voice.

I lay still and waited while, slowly and carefully, Delmar freed himself from the leathern loop. It was not an easy thing to do. A slender limb, half-severed from its parent bough, alone arrested the sinking which meant death. There must be no sudden strain upon that tender ligament, or the slight support it afforded would be lost.

At length the task was accomplished.

"There! I have freed it!" he cried. "Are you ready to catch it?"

"Yes," I replied. "Be sure to throw the satchel itself first. You can direct that in its flight. The strap you cannot guide."

"Now then — one, two, and three!"

I perceived the dark mass at arm's length, reached for it, and — failed to hold it.

But a loop of the strap fell over my fingers, and, closing my hand tightly, I felt at once the weight of the whole.

"Did you catch it?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes; I have it. Now wait a minute. Have patience, for I must climb down and cut the strap."

Carefully I slid back along the rough bark, holding my precious prize. I had planned well, and the joy of success beat in my heart.

I forgot that I was only to learn the secret of a purpose perhaps already carried out. I forgot that meeting at moonrise.

Seating myself on the knoll, out of Delmar's range of vision, I opened the satchel and placed my lanthorn where it would best aid me in reading.

"You must have patience, my friend," I said. "My knife is a poor one, and I may be a little long at this."

Then I unfolded the first paper that came to my hand. It was the message that Father Vincent had thrown over the curtain.

This was it:

"Du Beaulieu is at Vertel. I have his written order for the delivery of the countess to me. De Bersier thinks we are going for his fiancée. Where do we meet your men?"

I pondered this. They were going to get my lady, then. They would take her to Du Beaulieu. What for?

If De Bersier had come from Du Beaulieu, the count must at last be undeceived as to his wife's conduct. But De Bersier thought he was going after his fiancée. Was she there, too?

I re-read the note, and this time the last sentence impressed itself upon me:

"Where do we meet your men?" it said.

Ah! it was the answer to that question which I had carried to the monk in the napkin. That reply was, "At the pass of Meroix to-night at moonrise."

They were to take my lady to Meroix, then, — not to Vertel and the count. Men were to be there — Delmar's men! It was to be at moonrise. In an hour and a half.

With an indescribable chill of horror — my eyes half-blinded by a moisture not akin to tears — I grasped a second paper from the satchel, hoping for more light upon this conspiracy unfolding before me.

This was a letter dated three days before and read thus:

"To the Illustrious and Most Valiant Knight Louis Delmar, — Greeting.

"Your late letter, O most highly esteemed, was received by your slave, whose prayer to Allah is

ever that he may deserve your protection and most treasured confidence. It is with my head beneath your foot that I humbly request leave to express my worthless sentiments in reply to the offer that your Excellency has thought fit to make. Who am I that I should haggle as to the prices named, yet would I call your sublime attention to some facts affecting the price of slaves at Tunis.

"Behold, you, O most illustrious, have offered to deliver to me a man and his sister, both of noble birth. Consider, I beseech, that the man, being noble, will fight desperately for his sister's honour, and will probably be injured for our market, where only labouring men or scholars bring high prices. These nobles, moreover, often prefer suicide to slavery, which is a risk affecting the price very injuriously. As for a woman — I take your word for it that she is beautiful. Who am I to question my lord's veracity? But you admit that she is over twenty years old and a married woman. In short, necessity forces upon your slave to maintain his first offer.

"I shall keep to the original arrangement, and twenty of my men, fully armed, will be at the pass of Meroix at about moonrise on the night of the second of March. If my original offer prevails

with your Excellency, you will have the man and woman there for delivery, and payment will be made then."

This was signed " Bedreddin Ali."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE FATE OF DELMAR

BEDREDDIN ALI, the Moorish slaver and pirate! At moonrise to-night! At the pass of Meroix!

I thought of the Swiss and his daughter and of my brother's departure for Parsy because of their tale.

This hellish compact was being carried out even now — and by a priest of our Church!

Now! And I had fancied myself so clever — oh, so clever — in wasting out here the time that I might have spent in warning them at the convent.

I knew a short cut —

Too late!

The moon would rise in something over an hour.

As I gazed at my little lanthorn it seemed to swell to monstrous size, and, in a sudden delirium, there boomed in my ears an uncanny knell of "Too late — too late — too late!"

I cannot recount what chaos of mingled ideas filled my mind — what I thought. Judge of it by what I did, for of that I retain a strangely vivid recollection.

Dropping the papers in a heap upon the ground, I lifted the lanthorn and walked swiftly around the knoll to where a ledge of rock projected into the morass. At the utmost point of this ledge, I found myself very near to Delmar, not quite within arm's reach, but so near that the small bough to which he clung extended two or three feet over my head.

Upon this point of rock I kneeled, and threw my light full upon the entrapped man.

He was about to speak, but, as he looked into my face, he must have read my heart, for the words froze before they were uttered.

"Louis Delmar!" I said.

I saw the pallid mask turn whiter, as he realized that he was known to me.

"Louis Delmar, I struck you that night when you would have murdered De Bersier."

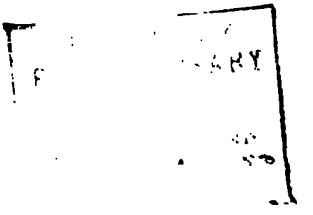
He struggled in silence and sank an inch deeper.

"Louis Delmar, you fiend, call on Bedreddin Ali! He will help you."

He cried out at this:

"God! You know!"

"I WATCHED THE SLOW SINKING OF MY ENEMY"



I bowed my head, and for a moment grief cried out through the stony death of my spirit.

"You have sold her purity to the lustful Moor! My lady, my lady! You have sent her away to shame and slavery! Oh, accursed dog — monster — devil! Lost — lost! Cast into hell pure as snow! My lady — my lady — my beloved! Jesu, is there no pity! Cur — devil — beast! Meet your too easy death! Die and let me see your agony — heartless — soulless demon!"

I leapt to my feet and drew Albert's dagger from beneath my apron. My tense fingers made the hard spring play with ease, and in an instant the bright blade was bare in my hand.

Delmar saw it glitter, and cried out thickly:

"No, no! Don't kill me! Think, woman! Don't stab me!"

I yelled with hysteric laughter.

"Stab you! Not I!"

And then with a leap and an upward cut of my blade, I severed the limb to which he clung.

His piercing shriek of abject terror seemed to fill a void within me.

When I had cut the bough, I kneeled again, and, holding my lanthorn high, I watched the slow sinking of my enemy. Watched, knowing that almost

to the last moment I could save him if I would — and I did not.

Scream upon scream of terror and appeal rang out upon the unheeding air, prayers, curses, threats, — all wasted!

His frantic struggles forced him down the sooner, and I held the light and watched.

In the lulls of his shrieking from time to time, I reminded him of his crime.

"You have sold a pure woman to the shame of the Moor! Hell awaits you! Go!"

And lower he sank, the black muck staining his handsome tunic and clinging to his white hands, hiding that horrible emerald.

Now the quicksand had reached his armpits.

With desperate strength, he pressed suddenly with his hands at arms' length, thrusting his body half a foot upward out of the mud.

Then he fell back, and the sucking morass mounted to his chin.

With his head thrown back and his hands protruding from the ground with vain gropings, he fell silent, looking into the grim face of death. And I still watched, half-sorry it had come so soon.

The muck had reached his lips.

"Pity, oh, pity!" he moaned, glaring.

The mire entered his mouth and he spit it out.

"You have buried a spotless soul in the slime of a Moorish harem — now die in the slime, devil!"

"Pity —"

The wet sand filled his mouth, and then covered his nose, and the word was but a bubble that burst dully.

The next moment the surface of the morass was level and seemed fit to walk upon.

I gazed at it and wondered if the body that I had seen but a second before was conscious yet, still struggling to cry out.

"What means this? What is wrong here?"

I sprang to my feet with a cry and looked up, advancing my lanthorn.

On the farther side of the morass a mounted knight encased in steel towered above me.

The face I could not see, but I knew the voice.

It was the Count du Beaulieu.

CHAPTER XLV.

GILBERTE SPEAKS HER MIND

"STAY where you are!" I cried. "For your life stand. This is a quicksand!"

I saw the great mass of the charger move backward.

"I heard a cry — twice," said the knight from the darkness. "Who is in distress?"

I sprang to my feet and started to reclimb the knoll. By descending upon the other side, I could avoid the morass and reach the count.

"Wait a moment!" I cried. "I am coming!"

As I passed the satchel lying upon the ground, I lifted it and gathered up the papers which I had thrown upon the ground after reading them.

Delmar's fate had not yet satisfied my heart, petrified by the awful shock of what I had heard.

Here was my master. His blind jealousy had made all this possible. I would continue my revenge — show him these letters — tell him the

truth. I would melt that heart of flint in its case of steel!

As I picked my way down among the stones on the north slope of the knoll, the light of my lanthorn flared wildly, died down, flared again, and then went out. The candle within was consumed, and I was left in darkness.

The horse and rider were directly before me, but they were invisible against the inky background of the earth as I looked down.

"Where are you, my lord?" I called.

"Here. I have not moved."

I felt my way carefully toward the voice, and brought up suddenly against the chain armour upon the side of the charger.

Only then could I see the knight — a black mass against the starlit sky.

"Your voice seems familiar, mistress," he said, as he felt my presence. "What is your name?"

"My name is Gilberte, my lord Count du Beaulieu."

He uttered a quick exclamation and tightened his rein so that the horse fell back several steps, leaving me alone. I did not follow, but stood still, smiling sardonically.

"Gilberte — the maid! What enchantment work you out here, woman? That cry on the night, —

was it a soul in torment with which you were communing? Stand back! By the cross on my sword, I command you!"

"I fear no cross, my lord, for I am a Christian. Not on *my* soul rests the guilt of that dread cry. Rather on yours!"

"What do you mean?"

"What you heard, my lord, was the death-cry of Louis Delmar, De Pompelac's brother. He lies there — in the quicksand."

"What! Delmar! Have you killed him, too? Was not his brother a sufficient victim for you and your wicked mistress?"

I leaped back to a safe distance, for I heard the horse advancing threateningly.

"You lie!" I cried, in sudden rage. "You lie in your throat, jealous husband — soul accurst!"

I heard the horse come to a stand. His rider dared not advance into the quicksand. Then I gave vent to my seething passion, almost forgetful of his presence, talking half to myself.

"She is an angel — your wife — my lady! Lost — lost — by devils! By you! You who swore to love and cherish! You a noble — a soldier — and you dare call her wicked! Ignorant — credulous dupe — dolt — fool!"

"She is mad!" I heard him exclaim.

"Yes — and you, too! Wait, O credulous noble — Count du Beaulieu — jealous husband! I hold it here — here!" I shook the papers in my outstretched hand. "Your madness is in my hand! You shall quaff it, lord, while she is bartered for money!"

"Bartered — she? Who? What is this raving?"

I made an effort to control my fury and to speak so that he would know the truth. He had reviled my mistress. I burned to kindle that indifference of his, — to hear his remorse and despair when he knew all.

More quietly then I spoke, and for all I saw or heard, I might have been talking alone to the empty moorland.

"Listen, and God have mercy upon your soul and heart, for I shall have none. De Pompelac sent you that accursed warning two years ago. The man who came to the eastern tower was De Bersier, your lady's brother. Do you understand? He was for the king, and De Pompelac hated him for past injuries. He wished to trap him, and was himself entrapped. Delmar fought with De Bersier the night I escaped. I struck the blow that sent him helpless into your castle."

"Oh, these are lies!"

"Listen — listen, credulous unbeliever! The monk who came that night — Father Vincent — he was De Pompelac's tool. He has followed you for vengeance. He passed through the inn of the Rocking Mitre to-night with young De Bersier unarmed."

"De Bersier — the prisoner!"

"Aye, soon to be a slave in Africa!"

"Oh, this is folly!"

"Hear me out! Scoffing will not save you! Yes, those two went on to St. Cecilia with your order — your order that gives Yvonne du Beaulieu into Vincent's hands. O God! Just God! I shall go mad!"

"This I know, woman. They are to return with her to me."

"And have they returned? Have they not had time? You see! They are passing down the Meroix road now, — now while you stand doubting!"

"The Meroix road!"

"Yes, to the pass, I say. There Vincent sells them both — De Bersier and your wife — brother and sister — sells them for gold to the Moor."

There was a moment's pause.

Then came the master's imperious voice:

"Come hither, woman!"

I walked straight to him. Leaning over in his

saddle, the count gripped me by the shoulder, and in a moment I was swung on to the horse in front of the knight.

"You shall prove these things," he said, curtly.

He turned the horse and walked slowly back toward the Lyons road.

CHAPTER XLVI.

REMORSE

We had gone back a little when four fierce dogs ran toward us, baying furiously. I spoke to them, and they fell silent at once, knowing my voice.

"Pierre Lebarre lives here," I said. "Stop and call for a light, and I will prove my words. I have the writing here."

We turned into the gate, and I slipped down to meet Lebarre, who had been aroused by his dogs. He was very deaf, and only the loud voices of these curs told him when visitors were near.

He had come to the threshold with a lanthorn. I took it from his hand and shouted in his ear:

"Go back into the house. I will return your light in a minute."

The old man turned without a word and closed his door behind him.

I walked straight to the count's side, and handed him first Father Vincent's note.

"Read that!" I said, and held up the light while he leaned over to read.

Now first I saw him in the light. Oh, what a face was his! Anxiety and sorrow had drawn such cruel lines upon it. My poor master! How could I — well — well — consider what I knew was even then happening. I cannot blame myself.

He read the paper aloud:

"'Du Beaulieu is at Vertel. I have his written order for the delivery of the countess to me. De Bersier thinks we are going for his fiancée. Where do we meet your men?'

"This is Father Vincent's writing!" exclaimed the count, looking up, puzzled and pitiful.

"Yes."

"'De Bersier thinks' — but that was the prisoner, the winged helmet — he was going for his fiancée!"

"I am proving my words, my lord. Do you believe me now? I told you De Bersier was the man of the eastern tower. Why did you cheat your wife's brother and send him on a fool's errand with this priest?"

"But — I knew him only as the winged helmet. He was under a vow of secrecy — I knew him not — and Father Vincent! He, too, was ignorant —

yet here he — Great God! What does this mean?"

"This!" I cried. "Read this! It is a letter I found in Delmar's satchel. Delmar, to whom that first message was given before my eyes to-day."

I handed the count the letter from Bedreddin Ali, and waited while he read it.

Ah, then — then my heart was softened. I forgot revenge, and let my tears flow as I watched that noble face bent over me beneath a soldier's helmet.

After all, it was his outraged love that had lost him. He had loved — yes, still loved my dear, dear lady. She was lost for ever, and he was to be crushed by the knowledge that his mad jealousy had lost her!

Slowly his features fell into lines of an infinite despair, — the strong jaw weakened and the white cheeks seemed to shrink inward, flabby and dead, till at last the note fluttered to the ground and his wide, unseeing eyes gazed into vacancy.

I saw his lips move and heard a faint whisper.

"Sold — to the Moors — by me! My wife!"

A terrible cry pierced my startled ears. I leaped backward as my lord sprang from his horse to my side.

"At moonrise to-night!" he hissed, staring at me past the lanthorn. "Take me to Meroix!"

"But, my lord —" I exclaimed.

"Hush! You know every path. Guide me quick. You love her — you love her! Oh, take me to Meroix in time!"

"But you cannot save —"

"I can save her soul. I can at least plunge into the midst of those men — kill her before they can kill me! Lead on! Lead on! and quickly!"

He was right. There was one chance in a hundred that I could reach the pass in time by a short cut. It was nearly three miles, but fever made us strong.

As I turned to lead the way with my lanthorn, I groaned aloud.

O God! That I — I, Gilberte, should lead my lord to this!

That I should be bruising my feet in a desperate attempt to be on time to kill my mistress! I — her slave — that would have cut out my own heart for her!

On over field and fence we stumbled until we reached the forest. Here, without a moment's delay, I plunged into a narrow path, with my lord close behind.

As we entered the wood, I thought of the last

time I had been there. It was with my brother Gaston, and we had snared two partridges. So long ago this was that it seemed another existence; and yet my feet knew every hollow as of old.

Thanks to the lanthorn, we made wondrous speed, for my lord could see to guide his feet among the roots and stones before us.

As we sped onward, I watched the east with dread, fearing to see the light of the rising moon.

From time to time I heard behind me the count's hopeless voice.

"Lost by me — my love — my pure, true love!"

God knows my own agony was unbearable, but I was blameless, while he — he knew that he had brought this thing upon himself — nay, worse — upon her!

At length we emerged from the forest, and a splendid view burst upon us.

We stood upon the summit of the southern cliff at the pass of Meroix. Before us was the towering bulk of that mighty rock known as the Rocking Mitre.

To the left, in the west, all was inky black, but in the east the moon was rising, — a vast ring of orange. Her light irradiated the sleeping lowlands far below us, touching the rims of the hills with a silvery glow.

I seized the count's arm with a cry, and pointed down at the white streak of road that wound ever down into the Saone valley.

A group of white sparks was dancing toward us. It was the moonlit steel of Moorish helmets. I counted twenty.

"It is Bedreddin Ali!" exclaimed the count.

"Hark!" I said.

Faintly from the west came the sound of hoof-beats. It was my lady advancing to her ruin.

And then, in the consciousness of her approach, there sprang into my mind an illuminating inspiration that transported me.

"Barely in time!" exclaimed the count. "If we cannot climb down quickly enough, we must leap."

He drew his mighty blade, and the splendid sweep of it in the moonlight seemed like a stroke of white lightning.

But I stepped closer and made him bend his head.

Then, as if I could be heard up there on that lonely crag, I whispered in his ear.

CHAPTER XLVII.

AT THE CONVENT

(From the Manuscript of Henri de Bersier)

FOR some hours my mind had been a prey to misgivings in regard to Father Vincent. Many little things there were which I could not understand; and, despite the explanation I had received, my rescuer's conduct was still incomprehensible to me.

Consequently, shortly after Father Vincent and I had left the Rocking Mitre, I determined to relieve my mind by asking a few questions.

I was riding close beside him, with the bridle of the led horse in my hand when I spoke.

"Father," I said, "would it not have been better to have waited until morning at the inn before proceeding to the convent? This seems to me a most unsuitable hour for our purpose."

He seemed a little taken aback, for he hesitated before replying. I had been until then so silent

and preoccupied that my question was naturally a surprise.

"My son," he said at length, "you seem very little eager to see your lady."

It was too dark for me to see his face, but I could imagine his sarcastic smile.

"And that reminds me to ask you," I said, boldly, "by what authority you expect to withdraw my lady from the convent."

This time the reply was still longer in coming, and I was growing impatient, when he said, softly:

"Why have you not asked me this before?"

"Because I have trusted you entirely, father. I still do so, but, as we approach our goal, my curiosity is strengthened."

"Well, then, you must listen to a rather long story. Only by telling you much can you comprehend anything."

I bowed without speaking.

"To begin with, let me assure you that I have known your name from the first, M. de Bersier."

I started violently. Here was news indeed!

"You know me!" I exclaimed.

"You are Henri de Bersier, third son of the Count Carolus de Bersier, eighth count of his line. Your sister Yvonne is wife of Count Armand du Beaulieu, whose castle we are now approaching."

I was amazed — dumfounded.

"Two years ago," he went on, "my story begins. At that time you came to Beaulieu on a political errand, disguised as a peasant. You needed your sister's aid, and you were admitted secretly to her private chamber in the eastern tower."

"Bon Dieu!" I cried, "this is a miracle!"

"An enemy warned Du Beaulieu that a lover had visited his wife in that room. Mad with jealousy, he taxed her with it and thought her manner suspicious. He found a handkerchief in her chamber which she could not account for, — a scented trifle, in the corner of which was embroidered a winged helmet."

My inarticulate cry cut him short. My brain was in a whirl at these confounding revelations.

"Do you mean to tell me," I exclaimed, "that Du Beaulieu has dared accuse my sister Yvonne of infidelity — and on my account?"

"That is the fact."

My arms fell helpless at my sides.

"My God! my God! What infamy!"

Then clenching my hands in a storm of passion, "The dog!" I cried. "I will kill him!"

"Patience, chevalier!" the monk continued, smoothly. "You can easily imagine that this is what the count has vowed to do for you."

"But my sister!" I cried.

"Was sent to the convent of St. Cecilia, where she still remains."

"What! With Marguerite?"

"Yes; but pray hear my tale. When Du Beaulieu left for the war in Italy, he vowed to find the man with the winged helmet. Two years passed, and finally, all unknowing, he found him — found him and saved him from the brutal heretic Von Frundsberg."

"What!"

I stopped my horse with a mighty shout, so intense was my surprise.

"Yes, your rescuer — your protector — the unknown noble to whom you owe your life — is no other than your sister's husband, Armand du Beaulieu."

"Marvel of marvels!" I muttered, and, in a maze, started my horse again with my spur.

"Do you still feel inclined to kill him?" the monk asked, slyly.

"Go on," I said. I was utterly confused.

"That first night in the tent, Du Beaulieu heard from your own lips that your lady was in the convent of St. Cecilia, — and then he saw the seal on your letter with the impress of the winged helmet.

In the first tumult of his rage he came to me, told me of his discovery, and laid his plan before me."

He paused, thinking I would speak. But I was silent. I could find nothing to say.

"That plan I have helped him to carry out thus far. But believing always that I could turn it to good, — and I think I can."

"The plan was — "

"To bring you here, ostensibly to release your lady, but really with Du Beaulieu's written authorization, directed to the lady superior, empowering her to release your sister to us. See! I have the letter here."

I heard the rustle of paper, but saw nothing.

"Yes!" I exclaimed, impatiently, "and then?"

"We three were to return to my lord, if Beaulieu had been confiscated, or, if not, push on to the castle. In either case, when you were with Du Beaulieu, he would kill you in his wife's presence, as he had vowed to do when he left for Italy."

"A pretty plot, truly!" I sneered. "I am unarmed, defenceless. Would this man try to kill me if I were armed?"

"Did he fear Von Frundsberg?" the monk replied, coldly.

"Tut, tut! A truce to idle talk!" I said, irri-

tated at this pertinent rejoinder. "What do you propose to do?"

"Wait a moment," said the monk. "Is not that the sign-board at the junction of the Meroix road?"

A dark, formless mass stood over us at our right. Father Vincent rode closer and felt it with his hands.

"I was right," he said. "We must turn back here, and take the road to the northeast. Jesu! How black the night is!"

With some care we found the road, and proceeded with the convent now in front of us.

"What is your design?" I repeated, after a pause of some minutes.

"Why, as I said before, to bring this sad misunderstanding to a happy conclusion. Du Beaulieu knows you only by the hated winged helmet. Were you to tell him the truth, he would not believe it, for he knows your family crest. We must have witnesses whom he cannot doubt. I intend to have your sister leave the convent with us this very night. Then, instead of returning to the count, or going to Beaulieu, we three will follow this very road through the pass of Meroix to the Saone. I know an excellent inn which we should reach by ten o'clock. Here we can spend the night, and to-morrow be in Lyons. From thence we can

send for Du Beaulieu, and convince him that he has been blindly jealous of his wife's own brother."

For some time we rode forward in silence. I was trying to understand, — to bring order into my mental confusion. It was long before I could realize that it was true. I could not bring myself to imagine that for two years my poor sister had lived under this crushing suspicion — alone in a convent. Yet I had this priest's word for it.

How could I doubt him, particularly as what he said accounted for everything. It made intelligible the whole strange course of my protector during our late journey. It threw light upon a thousand details that had puzzled me hitherto.

Then Marguerite returned to my mind. How commonplace seemed our little romance beside this great tragedy!

"And my lady!" I exclaimed. "What of my fiancée?"

"As I understand it, your wish was only to be near the damsel, my son. As soon as you and Du Beaulieu are reconciled, you will all return to the castle here. This is all that can be done at present."

"It would seem so," I replied.

Soon after this, the lights of the convent appeared before us at the top of a rise in the road,

and in a few moments our horses stood before the door.

Father Vincent went forward, leaving me upon my horse, and knocked upon the portal.

After a few moments of parley, the priest was admitted by a lay sister. I had a glimpse of the large hall floored and walled in dark wood, and then the door was closed.

She was there — my Marguerite. She whom I dared to call my fiancée, although there stood between us a barrier that would have cowed a love less fervent than ours.

I sat my horse, taking long, slow breaths of the pure country air. Was not this the air she breathed? Long my eyes roamed from window to window, as I wondered which was hers.

She was there, and her heart felt my nearness. I was sure of it! Oh, cruel walls, to keep a knight thus from his deity! To separate from his shrine a priest of the highest, deepest love!

What was it for which I burned? To touch her hand — to kiss the hem of her garment — to gaze into those sweet, girlish eyes, and then depart!

Why deny me this? No mystic function of Mother Church could surround her pure person with a holier influence than the timid chivalry of my adoring gaze. Why part us, then?

The door of the convent was opened, and Father Vincent hurried toward me.

"Chevalier," he said, "I must beg you to come with me. The lady superior declines to part with your sister save to a relative. My being a priest, she says, is not sufficient, even though I come provided with the count's written order."

I leaped to the ground and fastened the three horses to a ring-bolt in a neighbouring tree. Then I followed the priest.

My heart beat high as I entered the mysterious building. I glanced quickly about me, as though to see Marguerite awaiting me. I saw only a large hall, fairly lighted, from which a number of doors opened out on each side.

Through one of these doors, I was led into a side apartment, the aspect of which I had not time to notice, for, as I entered it, I saw before me my sister gazing eagerly at the entrance.

"Henri!"

"Yvonne — *petite sœur!*"

The dear girl hung on my neck and looked up into my face, her poor, thin cheeks wet with tears. I kissed her forehead again and again.

She drew back and surveyed me, holding my two hands and laughing gently between her sobs.

"Oh, little brother of mine! How fierce and martial you have grown! But I forgot!"

She dropped one of my hands and turned half-around.

"M. Henri de Bersier, my younger brother, mother," she said.

I, too, turned and saw the lady superior. She stood behind a row of stout, vertical bars, which separated our room from that adjoining. As I bowed, she inclined her head graciously, and said:

"We have heard much good of you, young man. You are welcome, though we had been better pleased were your errand other than it is. We shall feel sorely the loss of the countess, but we cannot stand between those whom the sacrament hath joined."

Very sweet and yet of unapproachable dignity was she. The ugly, straight black head-dress framed a face cast in a noble mold. I thought how her will might make or mar my lady's happiness, and I was deeply pleased to find her so prepossessing.

I was about to make I know not what polite reply when she continued:

"I must leave you with your sister, chevalier. The order from her husband will be obeyed, and she may leave with you when she pleases."

She extended her hand through the grating. I fell on one knee and kissed the slender fingers with something of awe.

She smiled over my head at Yvonne, and said:

"I shall expect to give you my farewell blessing in my own chamber, my daughter."

So saying, she glided from the room, and I turned to Yvonne.

As I looked at her a second time, she seemed wofully small and thin and worn in her long, trailing dress all of black, her hair without ornament.

I advanced and took her once more in my arms with a feeling of inexpressible pity and tenderness.

"Poor little sister! brave heart! Oh, the shame — the bitter shame of it, my dear, my dear!"

Her pathetic little arms hugged mine against her with a momentary answering pressure. Then she shook herself gaily free and rippled out in a tender laugh:

"Let us not think of it, Henri! All that is past. My husband has sent for me. Armand calls me. The long, long bitter night is over! All hail the dawn!"

She clasped her hands tightly, and gazed at me with happy wistfulness.

"Henri, Henri!" she cried, half-weeping, "to think that I shall be in those dear arms again, —

shall feel that loving heart beating against my bosom! There!" she sobbed, smiling, "you see I am a girl, — a silly, love-sick girl!"

The passionate words stirred my inmost manhood. I thought of Marguerite. I fancied her thus sobbing forth her thirst for my embrace, and covered my face with my hands.

Standing thus, shaken by a borrowed passion, I resolved that never — come what might — would I doubt my lady's faith. I had seen the awful havoc of jealous rage. *My* love should be freed from *that* taint.

Gentle fingers withdrew my hands, and my sister looked up into my face with a roguish smile.

"Ah, little brother, little brother! Tell me the truth. Of whom are you thinking?"

I smiled back again and whispered:

"Does she ever speak of me?"

"Ten thousand times!"

"God bless her tender heart!"

"But you cannot see her, dear. The convent rules are terribly strict."

"Not for one moment, here, with the lady superior near?"

"Not even so! Be brave, dear. I am going to her now before I leave. I will take her your greeting."

"And bring me some token!" I pleaded.

"Perhaps she would favour an exchange of tokens," said Yvonne, archly.

Blushing with pleasure, I looked myself over.

"I am a prisoner of war," I said, shaking my head doubtfully. "I have not even a button to spare."

Yvonne pointed at my heel.

"What is that?" she asked.

"A spur!" I exclaimed. "Do you think —"

"What better gage from a knight to his lady-love?" she replied.

So I wrenched a spur from my right heel and gave it to my sister.

As she left the room, she called back:

"Bring my horse to the door, Henri. You will see how quickly I am ready."

As I left the house, Father Vincent greeted me with a sour look.

"What means all this delay, my son?" he said. "The night is advancing fast."

"What is time to us, father?" I replied, striding down to where the horses were tethered.

He made no reply, and we stood there together waiting, each occupied with his own thoughts.

I remember how, in my delight at even this little that I had been able to accomplish, my heart ex-

panded toward all the world. I remember that I pitied the solitary priest, bound by an irrevocable vow that shut him out inexorably from the paradise of love. Poor man! Dead to love and to the fatherhood of the flesh! My reverence for the priesthood was increased as I pondered on this loss. Was it not a sacrifice of half one's life that, with the other half, Christ's lambs might be fed?

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN THE PASS OF MEROIX

In a marvellously short time, Yvonne had made her adieus and appeared at the door. Her poor face was flushed with a fever of rapturous anticipation.

I had the led horse at the door, and, as I lifted my sister into the saddle, she kissed me on the lips.

"From Marguerite!" she whispered, and laughed merrily, while I blushed till my forehead burned, tingling with delight.

We men then mounted, and I promptly gained my sister's side. We had much to say to each other.

Father Vincent declared that he would leave us free to chat of our little secrets, and rode on ahead. He seemed in good spirits again, and we gave him credit for much delicacy of feeling. How little we understood his motives!

As soon as Yvonne and I were alone, I said, in a low tone:

"Is that kiss the only gage my sister has brought me?"

"All you will get now, sir! How was it that you never told me of the winged helmet? Why, indeed, did I have to wait until a short month ago to learn then by accident who was my brother's lady?"

"What! Has not Marguerite —"

"No," she broke in, "although I have known her well for over a year, not until this very night, when she gave me the token for you, — not until then did I know that this was a sign between my little brother and his love."

She sighed with reminiscent sadness.

"Ah! Had I known it two years ago. Had I known of Marguerite then!"

And this was all the reproach I got!

Had I but told her all from the first, she would have been spared much of her long term of misery; for, once I was safe, she would have found means to send word to her husband, knowing that she could prove her innocence. But, with that mystery of the winged helmet between them, as dark to her as to him, no reconciliation had been possible.

"You are right, my sister!" I exclaimed.

"When you and Armand are restored to each other, you may give me the token. I do not deserve it sooner."

"Poor darling!" she cooed, softly.

Then she reached her hand to me, and, as I took it, I felt a small, round object in her palm.

"You angel!" I murmured, and pressed hand and gift together to my lips.

I knew it was a framed miniature, but it was too dark for me to see it. So I slipped it into a pocket within my tunic, where it rested against her dear letter, — the fatal message that had revealed to Armand so much and yet so little.

Shortly after this we came in sight of the pass of Meroix.

Involuntarily we stopped, Yvonne and I, deeply impressed by the beauty of the scene. As we paused, we could hear Father Vincent's horse trotting ahead of us.

The road sloped gently downward from the ridge we had gained, and perhaps five hundred yards ahead of us it passed between two nearly vertical walls of a great height. The distance between these heights scarce exceeded the width of the road all the way to the top. Through this defile we could rather guess at than see a wide moonlit valley beyond.

But most curious of all — a really fantastic sight — was the Rocking Mitre, a stone made famous by local legend. This was a ponderous rock of great height which stood upon the top of the southern or right-hand eminence. It was said to be so delicately balanced that a child's hand could rock it.

The moon was rising, immensely enlarged, and an orange-red in hue. Against this splendid background of light, the black rock did indeed greatly resemble a bishop's mitre in shape.

Father Vincent now called back to us, apparently with some anxiety:

"Hello there! My children, are you coming?"

"Yes, yes, we are coming!" I shouted, and we pressed forward down the road.

Then there came to us the sound of many horses, as of a troop approaching beyond the pass. Again we stopped, and I stood high in my stirrups to see the better.

Through the pass I could see the approach of the cavalry, the sound of which was now unmistakable. Their movement was made evident by the moonlight which struck their steel helmets. I ran my eyes anxiously over this group. Who were these men? What were they doing here?

I was about to dash forward to reconnoitre when

my attention was riveted by an exclamation from Yvonne:

"Holy Virgin!" she moaned, faintly.

I glanced at her in fear. She was crossing herself and her lips moved in silent prayer, as she gazed with fascinated eyes toward the moon.

I followed her gaze and sat petrified, for I was witnessing the most portentous and mysterious spectacle my eyes were ever to behold.

It was the Rocking Mitre.

Across the glowing orb behind it the colossal rock above us swung back and forth with slowly widening strokes.

I clutched my saddle-bow and leaned far forward, gazing with horror at the awful sight.

Then with inexorable majesty, the huge pinnacle swept backward, like a finger pointing out the stars.

Again it came. Leaning this time even farther.

It would fall!

No; it swung back, back, storing force for another leap for the chasm.

I called frantically to Father Vincent. There answered from just beyond the pass a fierce shout of triumph from that galloping troop.

Great God! They would all be killed!

Yet I could not move, for that titanic mass had ceased its backward movement, and, even as I

marked this fact, it slowly began another frightful swing toward the pass.

It was the last.

The Mitre hung one second over those doomed men who were entering the chasm.

Then it toppled!

The apex of the rock struck the opposite cliff.

There was a rending thunderclap, as the mass parted in the middle, and down with God's vengeance the two mountainous halves plunged into the chasm, the rumble of their fall pierced through by the shrieks of men and horses below.

The very pass itself was wiped out before my eyes. The great blocks rent the foundations of the cliffs, and, as I plunged forward on my horse, the walls of rock crumbled inward and completed the hideous holocaust.

As I was gazing at this, I saw — riding upon the crest of the landslide, like some deity of old — a knight in full panoply of battle. Over his head he held a woman, and by a miracle the two stood erect among the sliding, crashing fragments.

It was Du Beaulieu and Gilberte.

As I leaped from my horse and ran toward the ruins, there sprang out of the cloud of dust a wild, dishevelled figure.

"Mistress — beloved lady — dear, dear mistress!"

It was Gilberte who ran past me, while from behind came an answering cry of joy.

"Gilberte, dear Gilberte!"

Anxiously I sought for Du Beaulieu, and before long I found him lying stunned and with a heavy stone upon his leg. I rolled the stone away, and, on examining the limb, found it broken.

As I was moving the knight to make him more comfortable, a shadow slipped by me, and in a moment Du Beaulieu's head was pillowed in his wife's arms, and her warm mouth sought his cold lips.

His eyes opened and he smiled.

CHAPTER XLIX.

GILBERTE'S PUNISHMENT

TURNING from M. de Bersier's account, let us raise the curtain once more upon our friends in the Bourbonnais.

It was the morning of the fourth of March, and a light mist hung about the castle of Beaulieu, as though to conceal from the vulgar gaze the sweetness of the new love that shone within.

Through the fog the rising sun was shedding a yellow light into the very window from which was waved the green scarf so long ago, — so very long it seemed.

The count had been laid upon the couch near this window, and beside him, upon the floor, with her face close to his, sat his wife.

Some one in the courtyard below sang a fragment of an old song, and the two in the tower window listening, smiled into each other's eyes.

"Shall I —"

"Yes."

The countess rose, and, leaning from the window, —

"Henri!" she cried.

"Aha, little sister! A bright and happy day to you."

"Come up to us; we are here in the old east room."

"Nay, sister, not until you can assure me that I'll not be — unwelcome."

A shadow passed over the count's face, then he smiled.

"Come up, lighthead!" he roared, in the tones of an ogre.

"So gentle and courteous a summons cannot be gainsaid. I fly to obey."

Yvonne drew in her head, and, as she resumed her place by her husband, she said, gently:

"This is peace, dear. This is paradise!"

Her husband pressed her hand and answered:

"Why have you chosen this room, Yvonne? Are you not repelled by the memories it awakens?"

"I wish to keep all my life with you ever present, Armand, even the worst. And you and I will so live here that new memories shall arise to surround and hold afar the old ones, till in distance the ugliest shall look beautiful."

The stern warrior's face lighted up, and, as he half-rose upon his couch, —

"You are right!" he cried in a full voice. "God teach me to be worthy of you!"

There was a knock at the door. Yvonne turned and called:

"Come in."

It was Henri who opened the door. He came in full of high spirits. He was young and elastic in soul. The reaction from his dark trial was upon him.

"In obedience to the tender call of your Serene Highness, I have come," he said, bowing low. "May I know your Excellency's will?"

The count smiled happily and extended his hand.

"Good morning, Henri," he said. "Sit down, there at my feet on the couch. We want a witness."

The young man seated himself at the foot of the count's couch and looked about expectantly.

Du Beaulieu clapped his hands, and a man entered.

"Call Albert."

Le Ferrailleur entered shortly, bowed, and stood stiffly at attention.

"Albert, will you please ask Gilberte to come here?" said the count.

When Albert had left, De Bersier clapped his hands.

"Bravo!" he cried. "This comedy I find both original and amusing. First it is 'Find Albert.' Albert comes, and he is sent for Gilberte. For whom is Gilberte to be sent?"

"You will see," said the count. "In the meantime you will oblige me by fetching my sword. It is on the bench by my bed in the next room."

"Br-r-r!" said the young man, rising. "This is to be an execution, it seems."

He brought the sword, and the countess took it. De Bersier heaved a mock sigh of relief as he resumed his seat.

"Ah, good! It is safer in your fair hands."

Gilberte entered, followed by Albert.

From the couch the three aristocrats eyed the country girl, — De Bersier curiously, the count sternly, but the countess with a smile and a welcoming hand extended. Gilberte ran forward and kissed the delicate fingers, then curtsied and stepped back.

"Gilberte," the count began, "am I your rightful lord?"

"Assuredly, my lord."

"How did you escape from that dungeon?"

Gilberte glanced downward and plucked at her dress.

"I — I'd rather not tell, my lord."

Le Ferrailleur looked scared.

"You see, Henri," said the count, "you are a witness to this."

Henri nodded blankly. This game was too deep for him.

"Good!" the count proceeded. "You acknowledge me your rightful lord; you refuse to answer."

"My lord, I —"

"Enough! Let us pass to the next count. Two nights ago we met by the Poacher's Beech, did we not?"

"Yes, my lord." This very low.

"Did you tell me to my face I lied?"

There was no answer.

"Did you call me credulous, ignorant?"

Again no answer. Le Ferrailleur stood in the background with open mouth, the image of stupid amazement and scandalized alarm. Gilberte raised her eyes appealingly to the group before her. De Bersier looked nonplussed, Du Beaulieu grim, the countess alone smiled encouragement.

"Come, girl!" said the count, "now answer me this. Did you call me — me — your liege lord — a dupe, a dolt, and a fool? Answer me!"

Albert groaned.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he muttered. "What a woman!"

Poor Gilberte was blushing crimson. She shifted her weight from one foot to another.

"Oh, my lord!" she whispered.

"Aha!" cried Du Beaulieu. "You are witness to it, Henri. She denies not a jot of it. By the rood, she cannot! It is true — all true!"

Then addressing Gilberte again, —

"My girl, you are convicted," he said. "My lady will pronounce your sentence. Make it something lasting, wife. Some punishment that shall cling to her for ever."

Gilberte joined her hands and gazed in alarm at her mistress's face. The sweet radiance of loving kindness there reassured her, but she was puzzled beyond expression.

"Fear not, my lord!" said Yvonne, in a voice soft with tears restrained, tender with overflowing affection. "The punishment which I shall ask you to inflict will cling irrevocably to her and her descendants for ever. Gilberte, the words you used can only be atoned for on your knees. Kneel then before your lord and mine. No — closer — so!"

She ceased, and, with heaving bosom, held out the sword and scabbard.

The count drew the sword, and fixed his eyes on the down-turned face of his servant.

"You have given me the lie. You have called

me dupe, dolt, fool! Me — your liege lord! What name do you give to the spirit behind such words, woman?"

There was silence.

"What do you call it, Henri?"

The completely mystified man could only move uneasily in his seat.

"Well, I'll tell you what I call it," said the count, in a low, intense voice, "I call it *courage*. Yes, courage!" he cried aloud, with sparkling eyes. "The same courage that makes a man, a soldier, a true and loyal knight! Woman, you have been the true defender of your mistress. You have proven yourself worthy to bring forth knights for God and the king."

He struck the damsel's neck lightly with the flat of his blade. She raised her head and cried out with the pain of joy.

"Rise, Lady of Ravelle!" exclaimed the count, solemnly. "Be worthy of the order of knighthood, to which I admit you. You and your children are henceforth and for ever noble."

As the damsel rose, Yvonne leaped to her feet, and, taking the newly made Lady of Ravelle in her arms, kissed her again and again.

THE END.

L. C. Page and Company's Announcement List of New Fiction

The Bright Face of Danger.

By Robert Neilson Stephens, author of "Philip Winwood," "A Gentleman Player," "The Mystery of Murray Davenport," etc. Illustrated by H. C. Edwards.

Library 12mo, cloth decorative $1.50

Stephens's most stirring story tells of the adventures of Henri de Launay, son of De Launay de la Tournoire, made famous in "An Enemy to the King." Mr. Stephens has done what Dumas did in "Twenty Years After," except that, unlike the great French novelist, he has written his best story last. Writing, as only he among modern romancers can write, of fair women and brave men, the gay life of the chateaux and the dangers of the road, hairbreadth escapes, thrilling rescues and gallant combat, Mr. Stephens has accomplished, without question, his masterpiece of romantic fiction.

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The Prisoner of Mademoiselle. By Charles G. D. Roberts, author of "The Kindred of the Wild," "Barbara Ladd," "The Heart of the Ancient Wood."

Library 12mo, cloth, gilt top, with a frontispiece by Frank T. Merrill $1.50

In this charming tale Mr. Roberts has come back to the field of his first novels, — the land of Acadia. He tells a story which, although by no means a nature story, still has plenty of those vibrant nature-notes which have endeared his "Barbara Ladd" to its readers. Add to that scenes of tenseness and thrill which surpass those in "The Forge in the Forest," and one can see that here is a romance worth the name.

The Watchers of the Trails. By Charles G. D. Roberts, author of "Barbara Ladd," "The Kindred of the Wild," etc. With illustrations by Charles Livingston Bull.

Square 12mo, decorative cover $2.00

This is a companion volume to "The Kindred of the Wild," and is another collection of Professor Roberts's characteristic stories of nature and animal life, which stand alone in the world of fiction as absolutely sincere and truthful descriptions of existence in the untamed wilderness. They carry one far from the haunts of convention into the very depths of primeval forces, and present the savage instincts of the beasts of the forests and the elemental problems of living which attend those who live near to nature.

The book is sure to meet the favor accorded its predecessor and companion, of which a few of the criticisms are:

"Professor Roberts has caught wonderfully the elusive individualities of which he writes. His animal stories are marvels of sympathetic science and literary exactness. Bound with the superb illustrations by Charles Livingston Bull, they make a volume which charms, entertains, and informs." — *New York World.*

"Is in many ways the most brilliant collection of animal stories that has appeared. Well named and well done." — *John Burroughs.*

"No more perfect achievement of its kind has come from the hand of man." — *Chicago Tribune.*

"Incomparably the best in literature that has grown up about animals." — *Brooklyn Eagle.*

At Home with the Jardines. By Lilian Bell,

author of "Abroad with the Jimmies," "Hope Loring," etc.

Library 12mo, cloth decorative, illustrated . . $1.50

Here we have the heroine of "Abroad with the Jimmies" (a book already established in the minds of readers as one of the author's best) back to America, married, and trying to settle down. This book relates her experiences as a honeymooner, a flat-dweller, a housekeeper, and a hostess. Among her guests — as well as counsellors and friends — are her (and the reader's) old friends, the Jimmies, and her vivacious sister, Bee. These and a score of others — of whom the most prominent are Mary Jane, a new type of domestic, and "The Angel" — make up a pleasing group of folk with whom to pass a genial hour or so.

Of "Abroad with the Jimmies," the following are but a few of a great many favorable opinions:

"A deliciously fresh, graphic book. The writer is so original and unspoiled that her point of view has value." — *Mary Hartwell Catherwood.*

"Full of ozone, of snap, of ginger, of swing and momentum." — *Chicago Evening Post.*

". . . Is one of her best and cleverest novels . . . filled to the brim with amusing incidents and experiences. This vivacious narrative needs no commendation to the readers of Miss Bell's well-known earlier books. They will all read it, and they will enjoy it, and that is one of the safest prophecies we have made for some time." — *N. Y. Press.*

The Sign of Triumph. A Romance of the Chil-

dren's Crusade. By Sheppard Stevens, author of "I Am the King." Illustrated by H. C. Edwards.

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"The author has utilized to unusual effect the picturesqueness and fanaticism of the Crusading children in a story filled with eager charm and stamped with stern truth." — *Boston Transcript.*

The Green Diamond. By Arthur Morrison, author of "The Red Triangle," etc.

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"The Red Triangle" proved to be one of the most popular of the year's fiction. "Better than 'Sherlock Holmes,'" "Not to be laid down till the last word has been reached," "A first-class story of crime and mystery," are a few of the observations made upon it. This new story promises to be of equal popularity.

It deals with the adventures of a famous diamond, "The Green Eye of Goona," mysteriously stolen from an Indian rajah, and supposedly concealed in one of a dozen magnums of Tokay wine. An enterprising young Englishman, Harvey Crook, is the principal seeker for the diamond, and proves himself a worthy disciple of Martin Hewitt and Sherlock Holmes.

Hemming, the Adventurer. By Theodore Roberts. With six illustrations by A. G. Learned.

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The hero of this romance is a typical Englishman, straightforward and manly, with all the charm and fascination of the cultivated man of the world. His adventures are well worth recording, and introduce many phases of life and many types of people. The atmosphere of the book is that of real life, — of things perfectly familiar to the author, of incidents personally known and related in the spirit of remembrance.

The Hound from the North. By Ridgwell Cullom, author of "The Story of the Foss River Ranch."

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This is a story of adventure and mystery, starting in the famous Klondike region, then shifting to the "great northwest" of Canada. Gold escorts, government detectives, ranchmen, and smugglers all play their part, centring around "The Hound from the North," an original and thrilling, if sinister, sketch of animal life. The heroine is sincere and womanly, and the hero a relief to those surfeited with the ordinary "leading man" of fiction.

An Evans of Suffolk. By Anna Farquhar, author of "Her Boston Experiences," "Her Washington Experiences," etc.

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This is a powerful story of modern life. The principal character is a young woman who marries into a conservative Boston family without explaining her antecedents, and is obliged to exercise all her woman's ingenuity to keep unknown the existence of her father, who is the "black sheep" of a distinguished English family. She gradually becomes involved in deception, which grows more and more difficult to maintain, and which threatens to finally overwhelm her. The plot is strong, and the telling is brilliant, while the book has much of the author's gift of social satire, which was so cleverly displayed in "Her Boston Experiences."

The Motor Pirate. By G. Sidney Paternoster.

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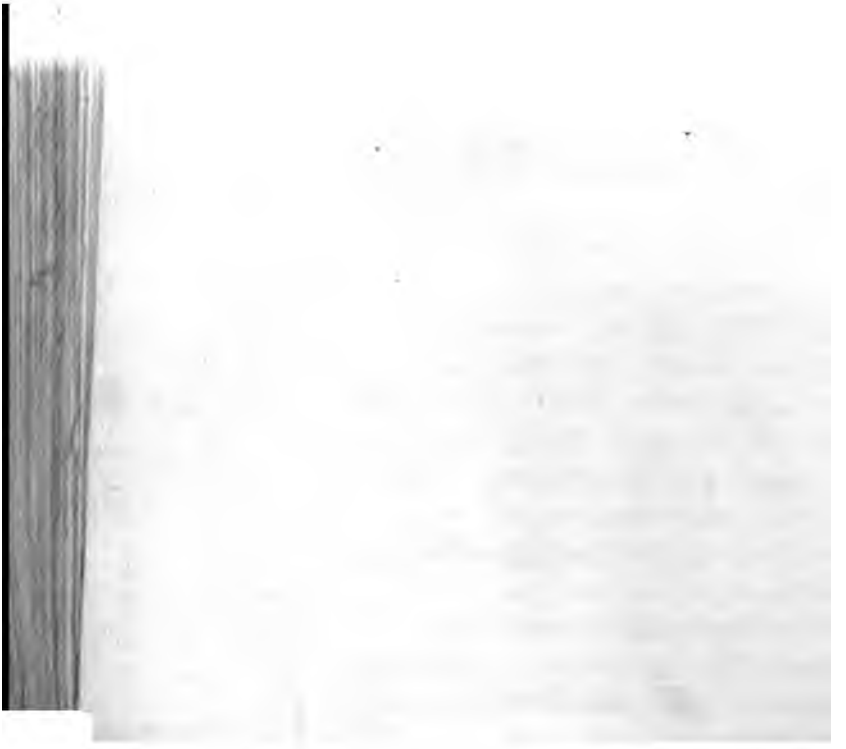

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